

# **PHENOMENOLOGY, MUSIC, NATURE**

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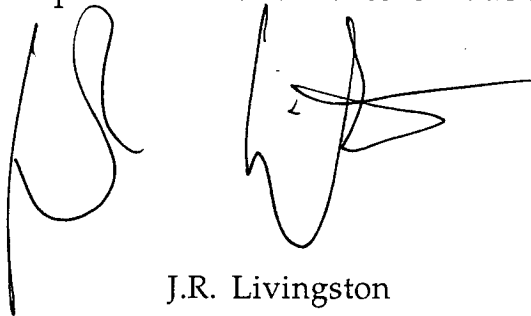
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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## DECLARATION

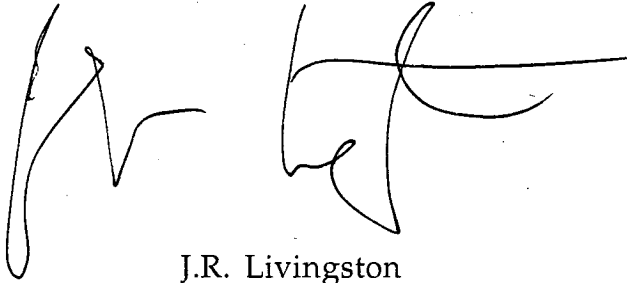
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J.R. Livingston

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## ABSTRACT

If one takes the preservation of non-human species seriously, one must be prepared to undertake a critical re-evaluation of many traditional, perhaps even sacred, metaphysical constructs concerning how we are in the world and the world in is in us - the questions central to ontology and epistemology respectively. In particular, the developing field of transpersonal ecology has assumed as basic that care and concern for Nature can only be fostered by a radical re-definition of our sense of place, and of the resourcist commodification of Nature whereby all living beings are defined solely in terms of their extrinsic, utilitarian, economic yield . Against resourcism, transpersonal ecology seeks to re-acquaint us with our embodiment in the world, a world where selves and beings-in-the-world are conceived as active processes which communicate in concrete contexts rather than as subjects and objects that cohere conceptually and abstractly. It is argued that such a metaphysical revision is necessary if we are to successfully pursue and realize the transpersonal ecological goal of Self-realization! or identification with others.

The philosophical framework for such an endeavour is supplied by a detailed examination of the phenomenological nature of perception and cognition. Why phenomenology is of particular value is that it begins where transpersonal ecology leaves off, or what is basic to phenomenology is that the world already exists right there, palpable and vibrant, replete with significance and meaning in perceptual settings before its abstract conceptualization. At all times we are immersed in a meaningful exchange with others which is best understood as a series of dynamically evolving contexts or Gestalts. Whether we be engaged in conversation, moving quietly through a rainforest or embraced by a resonant soundscape, we are always experiencing a process-based identification with other phenomena, be they other people, other species or musical tones. Perceptually, they are fundamentally the same: they all emerge, evolve and dissolve as focal points which resolve onto the horizon in one seamless movement of Being. What is most important for transpersonal ecological purposes is that nothing, no species, no tonal cluster has importance in isolation, but only in



harmonizing, communing with others in a fluid, ephemeral perceptual Gestalt.

The purpose of this dissertation is to phenomenologically describe the similarity that exists between the perception of music and of Nature. What is particularly stressed is that resourcism is deceitful in presenting non-humans solely in terms of presumed essential characteristics of economic import, a view that grossly simplifies and distorts rich perceptual settings. It is maintained that selves do not encounter a dead, neutral universe inhabited by discrete, atomic objects. Rather, selves and beings-in-the-world act as interlocutors in situations wherein an existential invitation is proffered by an engaging presence and is accepted by an embodied self. The meaning and significance of this encounter is shown to exist as a "steadfast friendly" commitment to the creative expression and improvisatory play which is forever at work in the delineating of any situation.

Music presents itself as an appropriate model for the elucidation of the transpersonal ecological approach in that, in its phenomenological presence, its real value rests with its immediate, situational, invitational aspect. As with the experience of Nature, the perception of significance relies on the capacity of a self to appreciate the temporary, evanescent disclosure of an other's being in its context. Though clearly operating within different time frames if one accepts an objective, linear conception of time, both species and tones may be seen to be of a similar phenomenological nature when an appreciation of their unfolding in virtual, existential time is acknowledged. The meaning of a particular tone in a symphony or an individual being in its setting requires the perceiver to adopt an at-tuned, anticipatory, listening stance which allows for the moment of disclosure to occur. At that epiphanous moment, past, present, and future fuse. The chord's or the species' name ceases to be relevant once the carnal, resonant being is fully appreciated within its historical, structured, sedimented context. And as the tone decays or the species melts into its place, the residue of the epiphanous contact remains as an appropriate, situationally grounded, commitment to the value of the experience, with a forward looking anticipation of renewal and re-acquaintance.

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1990, I was working as an ornithologist in the Tai Forest of Cote d'Ivoire, West Africa. Pursuing my usual rounds, I encountered a particularly dishevelled Narina Trogon, a not uncommon bird. The encounter would not have been particularly significant save for the fact that it set into motion a deep exploration of what I was really doing there, and what I was really accomplishing with regard to protecting the particular, palpable being right in front of me. It is easy to abstractly talk of species and habitat protection in a distanced and *rational* manner; but he was staring me right in the eye asking me what I was I going to do about his lot, in the sense both of his fate and of his intraspecific and interspecific brethren.

In the course of much soul-searching, I acquired Warwick Fox's *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology* (1990), which rekindled the interest I had had in environmental ethics and aesthetics during my academic career, but had assumed I had left in the past, having nothing more to say about the matter.

What impressed me about Fox's book was that it did not seek to establish normative axioms and didactically prescribe moral activity. Rather, it centered on the notions of "place" and "belonging" in the world and how our natural inclinations towards recapturing and fostering both might be realized through Arne Naess' conception of Self-realization!: "the this-worldly realization of as expansive a sense of self as possible in a world in which selves and things-in-the-world are conceived as processes" (Fox, 1990, p.197).

I had always harboured a deep resentment of resourcism, the commodification of non-human beings in the interests of human economic gain, yet had never located a convincing argument for its wholesale rejection. Traditional ethical and aesthetic arguments had always, to my mind, failed, as they almost invariably attempted to defeat the resourcist enterprise in a directly logical manner. I felt it was a mistake to engage resourcists in a philosophical game played according to their rules, on their own turf, so to speak. I found transpersonal ecology very refreshing, as it does not try to rationally convince, but merely to exhort participation in an

existential process of self-discovery leading to a more appropriate sense of worldly comportment.

It occurred to me, however, that appreciation clearly involves the positive valuation of something, and that the transpersonal ecological approach might be given additional philosophical weight if it could be elucidated by appeal to a common everyday activity in which its underpinnings might be easily recognizable.

What immediately struck me was that my two greatest loves, music and nature, bore an interesting similarity when I considered the way I approached and appreciated them. The more I looked into the analogy between the perception of music and the perception of Nature, the more excited I became. At first, there were two items that intrigued me: 1) almost everyone appreciates music in one form or another; and 2) music is ineffable, yet one does not require an explanation of its beauty and power, nor even a passing acquaintance with musical theory in order to find it meaningful and significant. In fact, I believed that the intrusion of theoretical discussions of musical meaning might even impede, perhaps preclude, appreciation. Pursuing the analogy in greater depth, a whole suite of similarities began to present themselves. Clearly, music really has import only in its direct, unmediated experience in a concrete situation. Moreover, it was clear that no single tone has any meaning in isolation as a discrete entity, but only in its interrelation with other tones in one whole melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, symphonic temporal thrust. And what this, in turn, suggested was that one does not listen to music in any linear fashion (i.e. to hear the final chord of a piece) and that one never identifies or ranks individual tones according to their potential aesthetic yield as musical resource.

This, for me, sedimented my conviction in maintaining that there is an analogy between the perception of music and the perception of nature. It is what this dissertation is all about. In what follows, I appeal to phenomenological description to argue that nature can be perceived and recognized against the backdrop of musical perception, understanding and appreciation.

# 1 TRANSPERSONAL ECOLOGY AND PHENOMENOLOGY: THE ONTOLOGICAL SITUATION

One of the most vexing and persistent problems associated with being a naturalist and defender of wild nature is that one is often called upon to label oneself to the satisfaction of one's audience. To be simply a naturalist is to divest oneself of serious academic or professional standing. One must pigeon-hole oneself as environmentalist, ecologist, indeed an "ologist" of any sort or, perhaps worse, as environmental philosopher, ecosopher, deep ecologist or transpersonal ecologist. This act of labelling, of self-characterizing, by a naturalist is seen as needlessly constricting and potentially misleading, as one can rarely be assured that one's definition of a term meshes with someone else's. Since my experience of nature is so personal and subjective, I cannot validly assume that my viewpoint is fully shared by another. The very term "environmentalist" is, in fact, so explosive in its connotations that I can expect my self-definition to be equated immediately with concepts such as "radical" and "extremist" that are so prevalent in the media. Furthermore, though I may have quite reasonable and consistent metaphysical and ontological grounds for embracing a certain position, I may feel that their elucidation is so at risk of misinterpretation by my audience that I will shy away from attempting a full-blown exposition no matter how convincing it might be. In short, though inquiries into what I am doing, what I am all about, may be sincere or innocent enough, I will fear that there is a subtext to justify my outlook if it be anything beyond that of a simple naturalist. I will act defensively as I will feel that any term other than "naturalist" will entail the utilization of arguments that are couched in terms that I find distasteful or at least unequal to the task. I simply will not employ the "rational" mechanistic/reductionistic, resourcist language that is expected of "professional" environmentalists, ecologists or ecosophers if they are to be taken seriously.

The main difficulty with characterizing oneself as a deep ecologist, say, is that though there may be a great deal of agreement about what constitutes the deep ecological sensibility generated over the last twenty-five years or so, it cannot be codified as a discipline in the traditional sense. It is a position that one arrives at, not through the laws of logic or inference, deduction or induction but through personal engagement in natural processes.



This having been said, there is still a striking convergence of opinion as to what constitutes an appropriate deep ecological perspective. Foremost is that traditional Western anthropocentric metaphysics is ill-equipped to deal handily with deep ecology's central exhortation: care and concern for nature based on ecological principles of inter-relatedness. Why traditional metaphysics cannot accept this fundamental imperative is that, at its core, it takes the bifurcation of reality as axiomatic. Whether one is a rationalist or empiricist, and hence either deduces or infers, respectively, the possibility of the external world, one must accept that there is an absolute ontological schism between subject and object, mind and body, man and nature. To accept that reality consists of the union of these polarities in a complex web of inter-relation is to deny the fundamental, self-evident truth embraced by the major players in traditional, rationalist philosophy: Descartes, Bacon, Leibniz and Kant. It is, in a very real sense, to commit philosophical heresy.

Though all of the dichotomies itemised above are widely discussed in the deep ecological literature, the subject/object split has attracted the greatest degree of scrutiny as it provides the foundation for the one thing that all deep ecologists find objectionable: resourcism. This cornerstone of the dominant Western social paradigm is universally deemed ecologically inappropriate as it treats the entire non-human world as a mere collection of objects or commodities determined and defined solely in terms of their extrinsic, utility value to humans. Why this cultural reification of living, sentient beings is condemned as inappropriate, even offensive, usually follows from one of three lines of reasoning: 1) it is deemed *ecologically* unsound for the reason that all members of the ecosphere interact in dynamic, evolving contexts to form patterns that suggest an orderly, unified whole and, thus, have value in the whole. That is, Being is seen to consist of all organisms - individually, specifically and ecosystemically - operating in relation to others situationally, each belonging to the whole; 2) it is deemed *ethically* objectionable to assume such a "speciesist" stance, to prejudicially attach more weight to the interests of one's species against the interests of any number of individuals and species each with their own interests and concerns. That is, it is wrong, in some sense, for cost/benefit calculations of non-human utility value to assume a pre-eminent position in the realm of ethical decision-making ; and 3) it is deemed *ontologically* questionable as to whether or not an absolute distinction between subject and object, man and nature, can be maintained. From whichever angle one attacks resourcism,

then, there does seem to be agreement that it is of crucial importance to question the validity of the metaphysical system from which it stems. For it is quite possible that it may just be a culturally and historically relative "projection" or assumption that may not be defensible in any absolute sense.

Though it may seem odd that so much of environmental philosophy is pre-occupied with metaphysical ruminations, rather than with technological fixes to remedy ecological ills, it may not be. For if one looks inwardly to confront one's positive valuation of wild nature, one is eventually faced with uncovering the reasons for a position so at odds with the rest of one's cultural inheritance. And since no belief, attitude, value, or assumption develops in a vacuum, one must, in order to be true to oneself, undertake a critical review of the philosophical underpinnings of such a bias.

It is generally agreed by the majority of ecophilosophers that the starting-point for such an undertaking is an examination of the way in which the self approaches Being. In traditional metaphysics the self, or more accurately a disembodied, alienated subject, inhabits a neutral, value-free realm and confronts reality as a world of discrete objects to be manipulated and controlled. And the epistemological justification for such an assumption is that objects exist as fully determinate prior to any intellectual synthetic act. All of nature is compartmentalized into things having eternal, universal essences, and in such a world there is a complete devaluation of the role of subjective experience. Individual conceptualizations of phenomena are, therefore, rejected as superfluous, even misguided. Moreover, in the absolute neglect of the role of subjective experience in the reification of non-human phenomena, abstract concepts standing for items of experience are taken to be more real than the phenomena themselves. And as if this existential estrangement were not sufficient for establishing the dominance of humans over nature, one final abstraction is made imperative: every "object" must then be weighed against a standard of its utilitarian functioning.

I think that it can be seen now why ecophilosophers expend so much energy in the deconstruction of Cartesian metaphysics. It is important to recognize that metaphysics must not be viewed in isolation but as the background for one's epistemological, and normative positions. In informing us of how we fundamentally exist in the world, how we relate to

nature, it also implicitly tells us how we are to understand and evaluate our perceptions and thoughts. Traditionally, we have been made to mistrust and abandon any thought of actually being-in-the-world. We have been made to maintain a radical scepticism towards our basic encounter with the world and to assume that all that is real are abstract concepts that mediate our experience. There is no room for the illogical, even perverse supposition that unmediated experience in concrete situations is possible and desirable.

### **Transpersonal Ecology, Self-realization! and Deep Ecology**

It may seem strange, then, that it is this very basic prelinguistic and precognitive experience of the world that many ecophilosophers take as the appropriate starting point for a review of our cultural estrangement from nature. It is hard to think of even one author who does not take the examination and description of our most fundamental experience of the world as the proper basis for establishing a more appropriate ecological approach based on concern and care for the non-human. In order to develop ecological consciousness we must first consider the inter-relatedness of self and world. We must attempt what Arne Naess advocates as the norm of "Self-realization!" and which forms the basis for Warwick Fox's *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology* (1990).

Though by no means an easy read, Fox's book must be considered mandatory reading for anyone interested in ecophilosophy in general and deep ecology in particular. For, in it, he provides an almost exhaustive bibliographical review of the genesis and evolution of environmental thought as well as the criticisms that have made certain avenues for exploration untenable. Though I cannot hope to do justice to the subtlety and persuasiveness of his thoroughgoing analysis, I would like to take some time to, at least, review his main reasons for rejecting the term "deep ecology" in favour of his own "transpersonal ecology".

Let us begin by first asking what deep ecology is all about. According to what Fox characterizes as Naess' formal sense of deep ecology:

... (it) is predicated upon the idea of asking progressively deeper questions about the ecological relationships of which we are a part. Naess holds that this deep ecological questioning process

ultimately reveals bedrock or end-of-the-line assumptions, which he refers to as *fundamentals*, and that deep ecological views are derived from such fundamentals while shallow ecological views are not (Fox, 1990, p. 92).

Science represents an example of this type of shallow ecological viewpoint because it presupposes as basic certain principles and assumptions which could be questioned at a deeper level; since it accepts quite abstract hypotheses as fundamental, it disqualifies itself from consideration as deeply philosophical.

Interestingly though, science's failure to fulfil Naess' criteria also serves to underscore the shortcomings of the criteria itself, according to Fox. The main difficulty is that the *formal* requirement to ask certain deeper questions is only that: formal. It makes no substantial commitments imperative with the result that conclusions about value-priorities that are fundamental to the deep ecological position are not made logically necessary. Consequently, one need not accept the ecocentric conclusions that are supposed to follow from deep ecological questioning. As Fox (1990, p.95) puts it:

The startling corollary to ...defining deep ecology in a purely formal way is that even an environmentally destructive view must be characterized as a deep ecological philosophy if it is derived from fundamentals.

Though the foregoing argument is the most damaging to deep ecology in that it is logically possible to derive both ecocentric and anthropocentric views from fundamentals, Fox also reasons that there are two further, more practical reasons for rejecting the term. First, is that the term "deep ecology" is often criticized for being "ponderous", "pretentious", "smug", "self-congratulatory", "holier-than-thou" and "pejorative". I will not attempt to elaborate Fox's discussion of the search for a less heavy-handed label. But suffice it to say that I agree with the term's detractors and believe that deep ecologists must bear some of the responsibility for the failure of the intended meaning to reach a wider audience. Secondly, it may be reasoned that just because one accepts Naess' *popular* formulation of deep ecology as it is set forth below, this, in and of itself, does not compel one to characterize oneself as a deep ecologist. That is, one can just as easily be an

ecophilosopher of a different bent and still adhere to Naess' eight basic principles, which are:

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes.

2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.

3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy *vital* needs.

4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease.

5. Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.

6. Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.

7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating *life quality* (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.

8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes (Devall and Sessions, 1985, p.70).

The point here is not that these principles are poor, self-contradictory or lacking in breadth and vision - clearly they are acceptable to the majority, if not all ecophilosophers, if one peruses the literature. The point is that there is no contradiction in accepting the precepts while renouncing the deep ecological tag. Just as there was no necessity to *deducing* either an ecocentric or anthropocentric viewpoint from the *formal* sense of deep ecology, there is no necessity to *inferring* either a deep ecological or any other sort of ecophilosophical viewpoint from the *popular* sense of deep ecology. Nevertheless, though the first argument essentially logically negates the deep ecological argument by indicating that a contradictory conclusion can

be derived from the same set of premises, the second has no way near the same force. It is not to be taken as a strict, inductive argument from empirically-based premises. This is clear from the fact that Naess and Sessions emphasize that the premises are meant to be *descriptive*, not *prescriptive*:

...(They) are intended to be expressed in a general, nontechnical way in order to be understood and acceptable to people coming from a wide variety of philosophical and religious backgrounds. This means that Naess and Sessions do not intend any particular *philosophical* significance to be attached to terms like *intrinsic value* and *life* (Fox, 1990, p.115).

The point, then, is not to view the popular sense of deep ecology as a program for ecologically appropriate behavior. It is only to be seen as a general description of what, for deep ecologists, constitutes an ecocentric, rather than anthropocentric position. The fundamental criticism is only that such an outlook is not the exclusive purview of deep ecologists. Hence, it fails to capture what is distinctive about deep ecology within ecophilosophy and should, therefore, be jettisoned as a reason for labelling oneself a "deep ecologist".

As we have seen, Warwick Fox's reasons for rejecting the "deep ecology" rubric is that it may be treated as alternately self-defeating, even self-contradictory, pejorative, or, at the very least, lacking in disciplinary singularity. Yet, there is still one avenue open for exploring its continued usage: in its philosophical sense. In its clearest and most compelling form, Arne Naess' philosophical sense of deep ecology, known alternatively as Ecosophy T:

...refers to the this-worldly realization of as expansive a sense of self as possible in a world in which selves and things-in-the-world are conceived as processes. ...(and) involves the realization of a sense of self that extends beyond (or that is trans-) one's egoic, biographical, or personal sense of self... (Fox, 1990, p.197).

Though this may not appear to be, on a superficial level, a particularly novel or important reformulation of the deep ecological platform, it is. It is

thoroughly revolutionary if one cares to take the time to spell out its implications for traditional rationalist ontology, epistemology and ethics. In order to get the ball rolling, I think that it would be prudent to first review the argument that grounds Ecosophy T. Through premises where (N) equals "norm", and (H) equals "hypothesis", Naess' normative system unfolds thus:

N1: Self-realization!

H1: The higher the Self-realization attained by anyone, the broader and deeper the identification with others.

H2: The higher the level of Self-realization attained by anyone, the more its further increase depends upon the Self-realization of others.

H3: Complete Self-realization of anyone depends on that of all.

N2: Self-realization for all living beings!

H4: Diversity of life increases Self-realization potentials.

N3: Diversity of life!

H5: Complexity of life increases Self-realization potentials.

N4: Complexity!

H6: Life resources of the Earth are limited.

H7: Symbiosis maximizes Self-realization potentials under conditions of limited resources.

N5: Symbiosis! (Fox, 1990, p.104).

Let us first look at the ontological implications of Ecosophy T. By the very fact that Naess characterizes Self-realization! as a process, he implicitly denies the traditional polarization of subject and object which, as we have seen, is one of the cornerstones of anthropocentrism and resourcism. For Naess, there is no such absolute ontological schism; subject and object do not encounter each other in any determinate, pre-ordained fashion as discrete entities in a neutral, value-free realm. By contrast, for Naess, an embodied self moves away from a "narrow, atomistic, or particle-like conception of self" (Fox, 1990, p.215) to encounter a field of embracing things-in-the-world which are not "objects", but eventful processes. In animating the ontological relation as process-based, he clearly denies that subject and object operate as static totalities each with fully knowable essences. The traditionally constricted and delimited self is, consequently, permitted to transcend autobiographical boundaries, to freely encounter

Being in something other than in terms of its anthropocentric, utilitarian functioning.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, it should be noticed that, for Naess, Self-realization! is to be treated as a *norm* of appropriate ecological behaviour and not as a moral imperative in the traditional sense in that it implies a reciprocal relation between rights and duties. The problem with traditional axiologically-based (values-based) arguments is that they are grounded by the assumption of a "narrow, atomistic, particle-like conception of self" behaving in accordance with moral precepts that are deductively valid. One's actions, consequently, do not so much flow from inclination as they do from the ability to acknowledge the logical necessity of an ethical syllogism. This is all very well and good for rational beings that can understand and obey abstract maxims. But what does this suggest for non-human beings that cannot do so? Clearly, a walrus or an oak cannot possibly countenance the logical force of the most elegant, formally reasoned moral argument, and cannot, therefore, be obligated to heed any assumed human "right". And just as they have no duties to us, so it can be said that we have no obligations corresponding to their "rights".

How then are we to establish appropriate ecological behaviour in the absence of axiologically-based arguments? Naess' response is simple: make Self-realization! a basic, guiding principle of action achieved by nothing more than a leap of faith in the possibility of identification with other humans, with other species and with nature in general. Prior to any moral reasoning, one is able to accept as axiomatic that the self is not atomistic or particle-like, but as field-like and expansive. And if one accepts this sense of self "...then (assuming that one is not self-destructive) one will naturally (i.e., spontaneously) protect the natural (spontaneous) unfolding of this expansive self (the ecosphere, the cosmos) in all its aspects." (Fox, 1990, p.217). What Naess is claiming here is twofold. First, he is suggesting, quite rightly, that one is not always argued into accepting a given position, but that some things are taken as a given, "right off", in the absence of proof or rational demonstration. Hence, at times, we all operate according to a leap of faith. Secondly, if we accept Self-realization! as just this sort of fundamental good or truth, and that Self-realization! proceeds by means of identification with others, then by extension, the greater the degree of identification (to be read as a qualitative deepening and broadening of self) with countless other beings, the greater the amount of potential Self-realization! that is



actualized. Thus, it would seem to be clear that if one is not self-destructive, it simply makes *sense* to attempt to maximize Self-realization! potentials by maintaining the utmost degree of diversity and complexity in the world. And this may only be achievable if one attempts a more symbiotic, ecocentric relationship with non-human nature. I think it is possible to see now how Naess cleverly and convincingly side-steps the thorny moral debates associated with a strictly rationally-based environmental ethics; by not prescribing any particular course of action, but rather merely describing what seems to follow from the acceptance of a deceptively simple and straightforward axiom, he underscores the reasonableness of transpersonal ecology's central exhortation: care and concern for nature achieved through the process of Self-realization!

What may not be sufficiently evident in the foregoing is to just what degree the cosmology that grounds transpersonal ecology differs from traditional metaphysics. It is not sufficient to simply claim that one is a transpersonal ecologist and that, therefore, one embraces an ecocentric cosmology rather than an anthropocentric, resourcist one. The difficulty lies in the full realization of what one's "leap of faith" commits one to, how one is to approach "reality". Let us first examine what is basic to traditional metaphysics: 1) subject/mind as thinking, unextended substance is completely distinct from, and superior to, object/matter, characterized as unthinking, extended substance; 2) knowledge of the world is derived solely from either logical laws of deduction - i.e. the world's possibility is entirely the result of the activity of a transcendent, constituting consciousness - or laws of induction - i.e. objects exist as fully determinate and are simply received causally by the subject; 3) in being bound by logical "laws", the subject is basically "passive" with regards to the "truth" and "meaning" of objective propositions; 4) the subject "recognizes" eternal truths in a neutral universe; 5) the subject's position in the world is one of cognitive and affective estrangement; and 6) the subject's activity in the world is constrained by adherence to abstract, prescriptive laws.

The basics of a transpersonal ecological metaphysics, however, could not be more antithetical as: 1) subject and object do not exist as discrete, particle-like monads, fully determinate and completely polarized; 2) knowledge of the world is fundamentally experiential; 3) the subject works with phenomena in concrete situations in order to elicit truth and meaning and attempts interpretation in a fully "active" way; 4) the subject "realizes" itself

and things-in-the-world as vibrant, evolving processes; 5) the subject's position in the world is one of engagement and identification; and 6) the subject's activity in the world is one of fully open-ended description.

In short, transpersonal ecology is a *lived* philosophy. It entreats us to attend to our lived experience of the world and maintain an openness towards other beings so that they may resonate within us. It reasons that we can encounter non-human phenomena in a condition of freedom, liberated from rationalist impediments; that we do not require abstract proofs of the world's existence, and that we do not need to deal in moral "oughts" in order to behave in an ecologically appropriate manner. By means of a phenomenological description of our being-in-the-world, rather than ethical prescription, it seeks only to draw out our "natural" inclinations towards compliance and reciprocity. As a philosophy, its only resemblance to logically-grounded rationalism is the suggestion that *if* Self-realization! is a basic good - i.e. is intrinsically valuable - for selves, *then* perhaps, by extension, it is a good for things-in-the-world as long as both are conceived as processes.

But, is there not a problem here? Does not the use of the term "intrinsic value" commit Naess to concluding that since intrinsic value exists that extrinsic value must exist as well and that, consequently, non-humans can be viewed in terms of their utilitarian, resourcist yield? Is he not implicitly committing the same fatal error that dogged his *formal* sense of deep ecology which was shown to yield both ecocentric and anthropocentric interpretations of appropriate ecological behaviour? As always, Naess' response is firm and trenchant: no. "Intrinsic value" is only to be used in "...an expressive, metaphorical, nontechnical, everyday sense" (Fox, 1990, p.222). It is simply a heuristic, linguistic means for capturing the positive valuation that people who accept transpersonal ecology attach to their experience of nature. It is not meant to encourage an axiological reading of Self-realization! or to stimulate the pursuit of something resembling an environmental ethics approach to Being. All Naess is claiming is that, by fostering the broadest sense of self, it is possible to identify with non-human phenomena, to establish contact with nature; and further, that, if that communion is realized, there is more often than not, a positive valuation attached to the experience of inter-relatedness. "Intrinsic value" does not inhere solely in either the self or the world, but in the wonder at the fact that there is a plurality of elements in the contact which is acknowledged to

be "beautiful" and "belong". Selves and things-in-the-world have value because they exist as parts of a whole dynamic process of Self-realization!

At the outset of this chapter, I outlined the reasons for my reluctance to refer to myself as anything other than a naturalist. But, having provided an introductory account of what constitutes a transpersonal ecological approach to nature, it should be clear that I do accept its philosophical underpinnings as straightforward and reasonable and the actualization of its methodology and aims as feasible. Put otherwise, I find that it fulfils the three basic requirements of a coherent metaphysical alternative to dualism as: 1) it explains *why* we should reject the polarization of subject and object in favour of a process-based conception of self and things-in-the-world; 2) it suggests *how* we may overcome our traditional rationalist alienation from nature by attempting Self-realization, identification with the non-human; and 3) it describes *what* its practice in concrete experience may yield: a thoroughly non-anthropocentric, ecocentric worldview which is far more ecologically sound, tolerant and embracing.

The greatest strength of transpersonal ecology, as opposed to deep ecology, ecophilosophy and ecosophy is that its very tag does not suggest some vague, impractical, arcane pursuit. It is what it says it is: "transpersonal" and "ecological". That it is "transpersonal" can be evinced by its rejection of a conception of reality where reality is seen as consisting of discrete, atomistic, particle-like entities operating in some distant, dead, neutral realm according to immutable organizational and causal laws. For transpersonal ecologists the world is here and now, palpable and animated by a plurality of inter-related, embodied, ecological beings, or more exactly "processes", striving for Self-realization! in a whole dynamic, evolving thrust. To some, this might seem to be just a re-statement of the definition of ecology and that, consequently, the use of the term "ecology" following "transpersonal" might be construed as being tautological. This, however, cannot be maintained, in my view. The difficulty in interpretation probably lies in our traditional alienation from nature physically, emotionally and spiritually. We still have a great deal of difficulty with the biological side of our being, still view ourselves as purely cultural artifacts. We, thus, still maintain a split between our rational/psychological/ethical side and our ecological side which is yet to be fully realized. Hence, there is a need to "ecologize" our psychological nature by moving beyond our biographical, egoistic boundaries by means of Self-realization! This non-humans do without

questioning the possibility of transcendence towards other beings. They already "belong", and, thus, do not need to effect a remedial transpersonal psychological shift.

The interesting corollary to "ecologizing" psychology is that the "ecological" dimension of transpersonal ecology implicitly contains an impetus to "psychologize" ecology as well. The distinction resides in the fact that whereas the process of "ecologizing" psychology aims to remind us of our actual status as ecological, and potentially truly transpersonal beings through the practice of Self-realization!, the process of "psychologizing" ecology aims to remind us that Self-realization! is not a uniquely human pursuit, but something to which all living beings aspire. This can be seen if we accept (again, the leap of faith) that *all* organisms possess a "telos", or in Spinozan terms a "conatus", which is the in-born striving to realize the potentialities of the self. Hence, it is in some sense wrong for humans to seek their own Self-realization! while thwarting its pursuit by non-humans. It is also imperative to bear in mind that since evolutionary processes have no end point, there is no achievement of an ultimate, "pure" essence, in either humans or non-humans. It is, therefore, wrong, as well, to assume that a non-human "telos" determines it to fulfil a fixed destiny that arranges and ranks it against an Aristotelian "ladder of perfection". A "telos" is only a striving towards Self-realization! If we accept the transpersonal ecological goal of Self-realization! as a norm of worldly behavior, then we cannot consistently accept the possibility of non-humans' attaining their ultimate essence as "resource".

In both the cases of "ecologizing" psychology and "psychologizing" ecology, the overall intention is to put us back in the world, to re-acquaint us with co-existence and to dispel any illusions we may have about the hegemony of the human purpose. The striving to achieve both is truly a movement toward a transpersonal ecology.

The greatest difficulty associated with transpersonal ecology, though, is that, as a fundamentally descriptive philosophy, it cannot compel anyone to undertake its practice. In a sense, it can be viewed as a program for activity which is already accepted and attempted by the "converted". Most defenders of wild nature already have, at least, a naive transpersonal orientation towards the world which they do not have to discover or recapture - it is something that has always been there. The project, then, is to make the

transpersonal ideal palatable to those who truly hold the reins in the arena of environmental decision-making. It would seem to be the case that you have to table a program of activity which appeals to an everyday mode of experience and behaviour which is suggestive of a transpersonal orientation.

### Identification

Naess and Fox suggest *identification*. Identification can be a very difficult term in philosophy. It is usually employed to establish logical equivalence. Its most common usage is in its role as a copula cementing the connection between subject and predicate: a bachelor is an unmarried man. The establishment of a priori, analytic judgments or "self-evident" truths would hardly seem to be their intention, however. This would seem clear in that the whole transpersonal process is a moving outwards of the self in experiential situations which are open-ended and contingent, unencumbered by questions of logical necessity. The way that I interpret Fox, "identification" is a "taking in", an "ingestion" of phenomena that permits "otherness" to permeate our Being and, thus, to make a difference with regards to our transpersonal behaviour. It may be seen along the lines of an unwavering empathy that may become so engrained that the concerns and interests of others become one's own, but never to the point of an absolute dissolution of the distinction between oneself and others. It is in no way to be considered as a means to achieving psychosis.

Fox's sense of identification has a tripartite division: *personal, ontological and cosmological*. The first is relatively easy to grasp as it deals in issues which are commonly understood: we have a personally based identification with our family, our friends and, perhaps, more abstract groupings such as our football club, church congregation or suburb. In contrast to the other two forms of identification, the personally based is predicated on a committed, often tacitly assumed, specific relationship with a particular person or entity or entities with whom or with which we share certain experiences, a common worldview or purpose. "We experience these entities as part of "us", as part of our identity. An assault upon their integrity is an assault upon our integrity" (Fox, 1990, p.250). The difficulty with such narrow identifications for transpersonal ecology, however, is that they may only represent instances of an inherited affiliation or be fleetingly significant. There is, then, the potential for their quick dissolution in the

event of changing circumstances which negate the original bond or at least render it inconsequential. Moreover, it can be argued that personally based identifications, particularly of the more abstract variety, maintain an exclusivity which effectively debars "outsiders" from the realm of moral consideration. One only need to consider the cases of sexism, racism or speciesism to recognize a potential for the abuse of affective ties. If the determination of identification with others is contingent upon them fulfilling certain minimal requirements such as the possession of a penis, white skin or bipedalism, I think it is possible to see how the lack of such "relevant" features may have rather unpalatable ethical consequences. Even such a seemingly superficial identification as the support of a particular soccer club can lead to the murder of those "wearing the wrong colours".

Given the unnecessarily limited scope of personally based identifications, Fox suggests that ontologically based identifications are more revelatory of what constitutes transpersonal ecology. Though difficult to characterize, they refer "to experiences of commonality with all that is that are brought about through deep-seated realization of the fact *that* things are" (Fox, 1990, p.250). Compared with personally based identification which, as we saw above, is circumscribed by a shared experience of the world with specific others in specific contexts, ontologically based identification is far more open-ended. It is truly *trans*-personal in so far as it is grounded in an experience of Being that is best characterized as a sense of wonder at the fact that myriad forms exist at all, that they stand out from an amorphous horizon in all their particularity, that there is "something" and not "nothing". It is the naturalist's thrust into Being, the open-ended trust in Being "being there" if the proper, respectful gesture of compliance and commonality is acknowledged and observed.

What happens, though, if you lack this transpersonal orientation towards the world? What if you do not feel the force of ontologically based identifications and view the whole project as thoroughly impracticable? In short, if those who determine the fate of nature seek a "program of activity" for establishing ontologically based identifications, what can you possibly say? The short answer is that the transpersonal attitude is not something that one can easily cultivate. Though it may seem to be a cop-out, it is only something that can be attempted experientially in concrete situations through a willed opening of the self to the possibility of an encounter with Being in its innumerable varieties; and even then it may not meet with

unqualified success. The fact that it is difficult, though, should in no way be taken to mean that its achievement is impossible or undesirable. If one needs a specific example of its realization, then perhaps the model of the naturalist's experience would seem to be as good as any. For naturalists achieve something like an ontological identification with Being in the absence of a recipe for transpersonal contact. The possibility of achieving ontologically based identification would seem to reside in simply temporarily suspending belief in commonsensical justifications and "proofs"; in simply making a leap of faith that contact is possible, communion may be realized. One only needs to maintain an initial openness which brackets received ontological biases. The only stipulation comes in the form of an admonition from Fox (1990, p.251):

For those who cannot see any logical connection between deep-seated realization of the fact that things are and the experience of deep-seated commonality with - and thus respect for - all that is, I can only reiterate that these remarks cannot and should not be analyzed through a logical lens.

As for the last of Fox's characterizations of identification, the cosmologically based, I will suggest that it may be seen as vague (in that it deals in images of reality that totalize, sum up Being) and, perhaps as superfluous (in that, in reifying Being it presupposes prior ontological identifications with individual beings). Perhaps, then, it may be jettisoned as a necessary means for achieving transpersonal Self-realization! Fox states that it "...refers to experiences of commonality with all that is that are brought about through deep-seated realization of the fact that we and all other entities are aspects of a single unfolding reality" (Fox, 1990, p.252). To use Fox's central metaphor for cosmologically based identification, we, and all other existents are leaves of a single tree which is taken to be symbolic of evolutionary history. The image itself is good in that it portrays all individuals as striving for self-realization in a shared, inter-related and inter-dependent evolving web of commonality. Moreover, it underscores the importance of fostering care for the tree in its entirety: no twig or branch can be removed without there being a negative impact on the tree as a whole.

My personal difficulty with cosmologically based identifications is not that they take any particular image (leaves on a tree, drops in the ocean,

whatever) as the basis for identification, but that identification with Being itself, rather than with its pictorial representation is, arguably, a more practical and realizable means towards achieving true transpersonality. As I will argue in greater detail shortly, one of the great difficulties with any cosmology or mythology is that, in giving an account of how the universe is organized and why we should take our cue for appropriate behavior from that explanation, we abstract away from Being. Instead of encountering living phenomena through ontologically based identifications, we encounter symbols, concepts and representations and not the very palpable living beings themselves. It may be overstating the case, but there does seem to me to be the potential for cosmologically based identifications maintaining the very dualism of self and other, mind and matter that transpersonal ecology strives to overcome. To implicitly suggest that identification should be with symbols and not phenomena is to locate care and concern, natural "value" within human consciousness - something which I would think would be anathema to a transpersonal sensibility.

As an overall framework for pursuing environmental philosophizing, I would agree that images of inter-relatedness can have an effective, motivating role to play. It is only when they attain a pre-eminent epistemological status that they can be potentially misleading and even counter-productive. In agreement with Fox though, I maintain that cosmologically based identifications are preferable to ontologically based identification for their openendedness: all beings are seen to be interrelated in one seamless whole, Being itself.

No matter how you schematize the porches of identification, I would think it clear that it is central to transpersonal ecology's call to realize, in a this-worldly sense, as expansive a sense of self as possible in a world in which selves and things-in-the-world are conceived as processes. If one can move beyond an atomistic, particle-like conception of self, move beyond one's egoic, biographical, or personal sense of self by means of identification with others, it may be possible to reject dualism/resourceism once and for all and to foster ecocentric care and concern for the non-human. All that is required is the initial openness towards, and compliance with our planetary co-existents, a process which Fox very neatly refers to as "steadfast friendliness" (1990, p.256).



As I stated above, transpersonal ecology represents a very novel and convincing means for finding our way back into the world. Nevertheless I think it prudent to recognize that Fox titles his work *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology: Developing New Foundations for Environmentalism*. As a new way of approaching Being within a very recent branch of psychology/philosophy, it is clear that it represents only an introduction to an original avenue for deep ecological speculation, for lack of a better phrase. I mention this for the important reason that I take Fox's work as foundational for the ontological edifice that I intend to erect in the remainder of this chapter. This is not to say that I disagree in any way with his overall worldview. Rather, it is only to emphasize that his ruminations are presupposed in my attempt to elucidate the philosophical implications that may be educed from transpersonal ecology. Which is another way of saying that whereas he finishes off with an exhortation to attempt identification in order to promote transpersonal inter-relation and care, I will argue that it is already there, but only under so many layers of conceptual obfuscation. In short, his conclusion is my beginning.

### **Transpersonal Ecology and Phenomenology**

Where I differ from Fox is in my assumption that there are *philosophical* grounds for *justifying* the transpersonal approach. I do believe that it is possible to mount a coherent, consistent belief-system which contains the necessary elements of ontology, epistemology, ethics and aesthetics and yet which is faithful to the transpersonal enterprise. The philosophical model that I will utilize in order to argue my point of view is commonly known under the feared, reviled and grossly misunderstood rubric of "phenomenology". I must admit that when I, as someone trained in traditional philosophy, first encountered the term, I found it daunting and inaccessible. My reaction to it was that, since its metaphysical grounding was so alien and its language so abstruse and seemingly arcane, it was easy to dismiss as inconsequential. Importantly, though, I could not quite erase every last vestige of its initial impact: perhaps, one of its greatest strengths as a philosophy. It gradually dawned on me that I was beginning, albeit in a very rudimentary fashion, to question the putative self-evidence of rationalist claims about the dualistic structure of "reality". But how could I possibly raise doubts about the verity of a Descartes, a Kant, a Locke? Surely to do so would invite the attention and wrath of a modern-day "Spanish Inquisition"? After I stopped running, as Dylan Thomas might have put it, I

began to realize that phenomenologists, or more accurately at that time, existentialists (like Sartre, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard) were telling me something about my own questioning process. I was not asking the type of questions that Naess would take as "fundamental". I was not going back into the ground of "metaphysics", not inquiring about the logical necessity of dualism - something which I had always assumed to be "true", "valid" and "indubitable". Yet, when I did undertake the task of "asking basic questions" - surely the role of anybody studying philosophy? - I was duly chided for my hubris. But this is not to suggest that there was anything unique about my case. Sadly, it is symptomatic of an all-pervasive, monolithic intractability that is rampant in reactionary philosophy departments. You do not subject the writings of the "giants" to superficial "existential" analysis. Moreover, it is nothing new. A quick perusal of any texts in philosophy over the last 300 years should demonstrate, almost without exception, that there is an unwillingness bordering on a pathological resistance since Descartes to undertake a critical review of the metaphysical, ontological and epistemological assumptions that ground rationalism; to even *entertain the possibility* that dualism might not be the final word on the relation of self to world.

There is a reason for my injecting what might appear to be a tangential diatribe above: it is intended to emphasize the adamant opposition that phenomenology receives from a traditional philosophical audience due to its perceived "extremist", "heretical" stance on the nature of Being and our relation to it. Against the backdrop of traditional metaphysical inquiry, it certainly is. Moreover, like "deep ecology", its very tag is often criticized for being "ponderous", "pretentious", "smug", "self-congratulatory", "holier-than-thou" and "pejorative"; but this in no way detracts from its viability as a means for opening to a world which is diametrically opposed to rationalist dualism. As the practitioners of both deep ecology and phenomenology would agree, the self-characterization means nothing: it is only a name. The approach towards Being, the transpersonal attitude that the term serves to represent is all that matters. What, then, is phenomenology and how might it serve as a practicable model for achieving transpersonal ecology? A brief, but excellent description is provided by J.H. van den Berg (1972, p.77):

Phenomenology is a method; it could be called an attitude. The method is a way of observing, new in science; new, for instance, in psychology, not at all new in general life. On the contrary,

the phenomenologist wants to observe in the way that one usually observes. He has an unshakable faith in the everyday observation of objects, of the body, of the people around him and of time, because the answers to stated questions are based on the results of this sort of observation. On the other hand, he distrusts theoretical and objective observations, observations at a closer inspection, the kind of observations made by the physicist. He distrusts standard opinions, quickly formed opinions like projection, conversion, transference and mythicizing. He is convinced that this kind of opinion mystifies reality with an easy, but incorrect, and as a rule obscure, theory. He wishes to hold back his opinion (for he, too, has to express one) until later and *listen* (italics mine) to what the incidents, the phenomena, tell him. His science is called phenomenology. His story tries to be the interpretation of what he observes: hears, sees, smells and feels.

Let us unpack this characterization and attempt to interpret it within a transpersonal framework. First, I think it can be maintained that phenomenology and transpersonal ecology share an ontological approach to Being which presupposes that the world is already "there" as an immediate, palpable, engaging presence prior to any abstract, constituting act of cognition. Pre-reflectively, pre-linguistically, pre-ecologically we bodily inhabit a world of dynamic, evolving contexts. The attitude that is common to both may be described as open-ended wonder at the incredible fact that there is something and not nothing, that things are, *right there!*

Secondly, both philosophies embrace a methodology for returning to the world of experience which is predicated on the active deconstruction of traditional, rationalist metaphysics which insists that we are never directly in contact with phenomena but only concepts or impressions that mediate our experience of the world. They entreat their audiences to encounter phenomena as they present themselves and not through a dualistic lens which polarizes self and world. They ask a subject to temporarily shelve his explanatory theories of how contact between self and world is possible so that Being may appear in its infinite and resplendent forms. In order to achieve this one must, first of all, suspend belief in the mechanistic/reductionistic scientific view of the world that treats all phenomena, including selves, as nothing more than discrete, atomistic

particles that logically cohere in understanding rather than inter-relate in the world. In both phenomenology and transpersonal ecology, selves and things-in-the-world are to be reinterpreted as dynamic processes that co-exist in a world of commonality, contact and communion. Why not? Why should one assume that reality is binary and logical? Why should one accept necessary, self-evident, "truths" about the world as more "real" than the direct experience of phenomena? Why should one favour an abstraction, an obscure theory of reality which often seems to contradict, or at least oversimplify the perceptual evidence at hand? There really doesn't seem to be an answer. It all depends on your metaphysical leap of faith.

If you are willing to attempt a metaphysical shift, however, transpersonal ecology and phenomenology, respectively, suggest the following remedial methodologies for returning to the phenomenal world: 1) attempt Self-realization!, the active, disciplined extending and broadening of the self which transcends egoistic, biographical boundaries by means of identification with others in an ever-expanding spiral of curiosity, wonder and concern. Allow your shell of self-interest to become permeable, let the concerns and interests of others interpenetrate, merge with your own! Extend a hand and discover significance! Accept the proffered invitation and reap the experiential reward!; 2) attempt the phenomenological reduction which is, basically, the active bracketing of culturally-received preconceptions about the nature of self and world so that Being may appear in and of itself. Attempt to insinuate yourself into the world, to work with given phenomena in order to elicit meanings and evoke significance. Attempt open-ended descriptions in the absence of theoretical frames of reference and explanations and in full knowledge that any articulation of the experience will never capture its essence, will never exhaust its meaning. Since one only encounters temporary Gestalts, momentary groupings of phenomena and not abstractions which are universally, eternally true at this basic pre-reflective, perceptual level, there is always the possibility for further exploration and re-interpretation, hermeneutic retrieval and up-dating. Just be alert to the threat of existential alienation which ensues from the process of making conceptualizations "indubitable", and of making appropriate behaviour "mandatory".

## Phenomenological Experience: Some Basic Features

Much more will be made of the analogy between phenomenology and transpersonal ecology and the phenomenological reduction as well in due course. But, for now, I would like to return to my exposition of phenomenology and this strange concept of pre-personal, pre-reflective bodily understanding. Perhaps the greatest difficulty in coming to terms with phenomenology is that it is so basic to all experiences of Being that we cannot countenance, even feel, the subtlety and all-pervasiveness of its movement. It is, after all, as van den Berg put it above, a description of the way in which one usually observes. Yet, its very familiarity makes it very difficult to describe. To put it in perspective, let us ask two very basic questions which are infinitely complex to most minds: what is time?; what is space? One usually finds that, in attempting an explanation of either, one becomes hopelessly flustered. You know what they are, but in the very attempt to come to terms with them, you find them slipping away, becoming increasingly inaccessible and indeterminate. But you *know* what they are. What on earth is going on here? The main difficulty is that our bodies so completely inhabit space and time that we cannot achieve the distance required to adequately define them. Yet, at the same time, we have no trouble *living* the answer to questions about the nature of space and time. We move through both with our bodies with absolute ease up to the point that we undertake reflection about the body's possibility of achieving such movement. This is due to the fact that the body is already completely engaged in an activity which is moving towards completion before it conceives of the possibility of achieving the act. In fact the intrusion of a self-conscious contemplation of the nature of the relation between a constituting consciousness and a remote object in the world as the basis for an act's completion would probably thwart the realization of the event. This may sound silly (it is), but this is what the acceptance of dualism logically commits us to. Since subject and object, mind and matter are utterly polarized, we must provide an abstract account of how two completely different substances can interact. If, however, one accepts the phenomenological conception of embodiment, that the body is already attuned to Being, already engaged in realizing an intention to do something, is, in fact "already there" at the end of its task pre-reflectively, space and time are no longer problematic. It simply is not necessary to mount the logical explanation of the relation of subject and object in space and time to justify the possibility of an event's taking place. An act is

possible because the body is already doing it in-the-world without rational instruction. Consider the example of a man looking desperately for an ashtray (Kohak, 1978, p.11):

After a few puffs, the subject looks anxiously for a place to deposit his ashes. There are no ashtrays. The subject casts about, settles on a seashell or a nut dish, and, with a mixture of anxiety and relief, knocks off the ash. He did not "find" an ashtray "in the objective world"; there was none there to be found. Rather, he constituted an ashtray in his act.

Common sense, in ordinary reports, passes over this and, instead of reporting, *interprets* the experience as an encounter with an object out there in the world. Consider further Neil Evernden's reflection on Kohak (1985, p.58):

Notice that common sense finds a world of objects because it overlooks the act of consciousness and concentrates on an interpretation of what is experienced. Hence the thing identified always seems more central and more real than the act itself - the act remains effectively invisible, for it is not noticed. But to be ignorant of the act is to miss the very context of meaning for the object. Remember, the smoker's ashtray was not there until it was required. Yet the ashtray he believes he found was not imaginary either; it exists where it functions, in his experience.

At root, phenomenology is the description of how the body, pre-reflectively, achieves this possibility while holding logical explanation in abeyance. As J.H. van den Berg (1972, p.75) captures it:

to arrive at an explanation of pre-reflective matters... one has to abandon the usual way of thinking. Instead of propounding a reflective and, as is illustrated by the history of thought, always slightly strange, artificial and therefore not quite satisfactory, theory on the stated problems, one has to make the problem speak for itself.

Put otherwise, phenomenology has two fundamental aims: 1) to remind its potential practitioner that the self that inhabits the realm of common sense or science that stands apart from experience and confronts the world as a domain of objects to be rationally grasped and controlled is not yet capable of the pre-personal, perceptual approach to Being that phenomenology demands as a commitment to perceptual engagement; and 2) to suggest that our bodies are already attuned to Being (as was assumed in the above argument concerning the body's ability to negotiate space and time prereflectively), yet we are "forgetful" of Being, out of touch with its underlying sources and grounds. We need, therefore, to provide an account of this innate embodiment; we need phenomenological description and not second-order scientific explanation of our being-in-the-world.

I do not think it is an exaggeration to suggest that the phenomenologist is "obsessed" with the concrete. He is fascinated with the objects that surround him, but not in the same way that the scientist would be as he has a radically different attitude towards the "object". The object is not something that possesses an immutable, fully determinate nature. And contact with it is not assumed to reside in the possibility of its understanding by a transcendent consciousness. For the phenomenologist, the object is undeniably *there*, but as a potential *field* for eventful, creative exploration. And since it is already there prior to any questions concerning that possibility, the phenomenologist does not need to explain his existential positioning according to abstract reasoning that reinforces absolute ontological schisms and, therefore, anthropocentrism. His ontological "theory" is the polar opposite to the one that is presupposed in scientific inquiry. His "theory" begins and ends with that phenomenon *there*.

On the surface it may seem insane that it is possible to espouse an ontological theory that is grounded in nothing more than simple faith in "being there". Surely, something that is pre-reflective and pre-cognitive could be dismissed out of hand as absolutely ineffable, and, therefore, untenable? It is, in a sense. But only if you presuppose the necessary truth of dualism and abstract cognition. If you can bracket the prejudices of such a conceptualization of reality and temporarily concede the possibility of bodily understanding of "being there", the phenomenological attitude may not appear so ludicrous. Van den Berg (1972, p.76), for example, argues that there are some among us who regularly and non-freakishly undertake its practice:

Objects have something to say to us - this is common knowledge among poets and painters. Therefore, poets and painters are born phenomenologists. Or rather, we are all born phenomenologists; the poets and painters among us, however, are capable of conveying their views to others, a procedure also attempted laboriously, by the professional phenomenologist. We all understand the language of objects. [But] we live in an adjusted world, in a self-evident one...[if we grant the possibility of phenomenological description of the bodily understanding of "being there"] the swimmer enters the world because the water is proving to him in a thousand ways that it is prepared to receive his body. The child digs into the sand because the sand cries out to it: dig! This is the way we move into a house. We see the rooms the way they will be furnished later: there the corner to sit in, there the bed for the child, there the warmth in winter, there the coolness in the summer. There: domesticity. The house is habitable.

This is all so apparently clear and "normal" that it would hardly seem necessary for phenomenology to defend its rejection of dualism on any level. Yet, the very tenacity of rationalist metaphysics is such that phenomenology must provide a philosophically rigorous methodology and justification for returning to the everyday experience of the world. Unfortunately, however, since that experience is so elusive and its description so bound up with traditional dualistic interpretations of the relation of subject and object, phenomenology must employ "daunting" and seemingly "inaccessible" language in order to effectively capture its radical departure from mainstream metaphysics. In the remainder of this chapter, consequently, I will attempt to elucidate what I take to be the key themes in phenomenology, particularly as they are presented in the works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

In the Preface to his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty provides an introduction to the nature of phenomenology (1962, p.vii):

Phenomenology is the study of essences; and according to it, all problems amount to finding definitions of essences: the essence of perception, or the essence of consciousness, for example. But



phenomenology is also a philosophy which puts essences back into existence, and does not expect to arrive at an understanding of man and the world from any starting point other than that of their "facticity". It is a transcendental philosophy which places in abeyance the assertions arising out of the natural attitude, the better to understand them; but it is also a philosophy for which the world is "already there" before reflection begins - as an inalienable presence; and all its efforts are concentrated upon re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world, and endowing that contact with a philosophical status. It is the search for a philosophy which shall be a "rigorous science", but it also offers an account of space, time and the world as we "live" them. It tries to give a direct description of our experience as it is, without taking account of its psychological origin and the causal explanations which the scientist, historian or the sociologist may be able to provide.

Perhaps the most important thing to be garnered from this quote is that phenomenology, at root, is a protest on behalf of a non-dualistic approach to Being. Like transpersonal ecology, its central ontological assumption is that we are rooted in, enjoy a primitive, innate contact with, Being prior to any abstract justification of that relation: this is our "facticity" or "thrownness", our inherence or involvement in any particular situation. Subject and object, then, are not two completely distinct substances whose interaction requires abstract explanation and justification. Since we, "subjects" and "objects" alike, already exist as things-in-the-world, we do not need to provide a causal account or rational demonstration for the possibility of the transcendence of the subject towards the world. In fact, the only transcendence that is required is the transcendence of the worn-out, traditional conceptualizations of "subject" and "object" which make the possibility of transcendence problematic.

Where phenomenology again resembles transpersonal ecology is in its thorough questioning of science's need to conceive of the self as a disembodied, atomistic, particle-like monad standing opposed to a barren, tasteless, soundless universe of causally organized matter. Surely it is possible to acknowledge that we, scientists included, may already be bodily engaged in a world of significance and wonder right here and right now. Is it

not just possible that the putative need to abstract away from the experiential world, to assume concepts to be more real than phenomena themselves might represent a case of what Alfred North Whitehead refers to as the "Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness"? (Whitehead, 1938, p.66). In short, does science really need to so devalue the nature and role of subjects and objects in conceiving of them as discrete, neutral particles moving indifferently towards each other according to abstract causal laws? Consider Merleau-Ponty's view (1962, pps. viii-ix):

I am not the outcome or the meeting-point of numerous causal agencies which determine my bodily or psychological make-up. I cannot conceive of myself as nothing but a bit of the world, a mere object of biological, psychological or sociological investigation. I cannot shut myself up within the realm of science. All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless. The whole universe of science is built upon the world as directly experienced, and if we want to subject science itself to rigorous scrutiny and arrive at a precise assessment of its meaning and scope, we must begin by reawakening the basic experience of the world of which science is the second-order expression... Scientific points of view, according to which my existence is a moment of the world's, are always both naive and at the same time dishonest, because they take for granted, without explicitly mentioning it, the other point of view, namely that of consciousness, through which from the outset a world forms itself around me and begins to exist for me. To return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always *speaks*, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the countryside in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is.

The central problem with scientific or empirical conceptions of the subject/object relation is that they assume that discrete, fully determinate objects already exist in the world without some form of subjective input.

The subject's role, then, is only that of a passive receptacle receiving pre-determined "facts" about the world. Since "objects" already possess an absolute nature or essence prior to their existence, there is no need for subjective interpretation of immediately given phenomena. The subject's conception of any object, then, is simply the outcome of external forces in the world which link sensations of the object independently of any subjective activity. Yet, if this is true, where is the "subject"? If the "subject" is nothing more than a detached, neutral spectator, an "anybody" simply receiving sense-data, what could possibly be meant by "subjectivity" which implies the existence of a centre of agency, an individual positioned towards the world? Is it not possible that science/empiricism implicitly succeeds only in making the subject illusory, redundant or even self-contradictory and, in having done so, rendering the need for a dualistic hypothesis questionable, or even untenable? It would seem that if science wants to maintain the subjective side of the dialectic, it must be presupposed that there is a particular subject with a particular perspective on the world. The very essence of subjectivity is that there is someone making a selection, a decision, continually attempting to come to terms with the world within an individual framework of understanding.

But whereas the central difficulty with empiricism is that, in making the world so fully objective, it makes that world uninhabitable for subjects, its dualistic counterpart, idealism/rationalism/intellectualism also fails but for the reason that it over-emphasizes the subjective side of the dialectic. The clearest statement of rationalism, certainly the most often cited, is found in Descartes. As anyone with even a passing acquaintance with the history of ideas well knows, Descartes' philosophy represents an attempt to establish one absolutely certain, indubitable "truth" about the world from which all ontological and epistemological truths may be deduced. In order to arrive at absolute certainty, he employed a program of radical scepticism, of methodically doubting everything from the existence of the external world to the "truths" of mathematics. His observations of the external world could not yield "clear and distinct ideas" for the simple fact that objects, including his own body, represented examples of "unthinking, extended" matter of which his mind, being of an entirely different "thinking, unextended" substance could have no thought. How could two absolutely different substances possibly interact? They could not, given his definitional polarization of the two substances. The only thing about which he could possibly be certain, however, was that he existed. It was obvious to him that

whenever he thought, it was clear that he existed. "I think, therefore I am" was certain every time he thought it and, thus, became the cornerstone of his metaphysics. The experience of the world, then, ceased to be so problematic as long as its existence was made immanent in a self-conscious act of apprehending it. The world's existence became entirely a question of its possible reconstitution by a transcendent self-consciousness.

I fully acknowledge that my characterizations of the two dominant strains of dualism, empiricism and rationalism, are but thumb-nail sketches and that there is a plethora of subtle and convincing arguments for accepting either approach. My reason for not delving further into the debate is twofold: 1) the arguments are so complex that their development would unnecessarily distract from the over-all thesis at hand; and 2) both theories are so well known that they are amenable to a quick review of their metaphysical foundations. All I have sought to do is to underscore the weight that both theories attach to the subject side and object side of dualism and, consequently, what this means for conceptualizations of the self/world dichotomy. It can be reasoned that the emphasis that empiricism puts on objectivity results in the loss of the subject; since the subject is essentially a passive receptacle causally receiving pre-determined facts about the world, personal points of view are marginalized to the point of non-existence. And yet while rationalism attempts to offset this imbalance by emphasizing the active role of the subject in establishing the world's possibility through self-conscious acts of constitution, it does this so successfully that the result is the loss of the world. It would seem then that radical dualism forces us onto the horns of a dilemma: we can either accept that everything takes place in the objective world and, hence, that there is no perceiving subject, or we can reject "the materialistic objectivism of empiricism in favour of a pure interiority, a Cogito whose sole existence is to think" (Madison, 1981, p.19).

Nevertheless, there is a route around this apparently insurmountable impasse: and that is to reject dualism altogether. Though seemingly impossible, such a move is philosophically justifiable. Logic only requires that if you accept the premises and the conclusion does not contradict the premises, then you must accept the conclusion. If the conclusion is logically necessary, is entailed by the premises, you cannot accept an opposite conclusion without contradiction. There is nothing logically wrong, however, with rejecting premises and conclusion alike. To use a rather banal analogy: if you engage in a game of chess, you must play by the rules;

yet there is nothing wrong with deciding not to play. That is your prerogative.

Phenomenology exercises this prerogative by means of the phenomenological reduction which brackets the traditional perceptual prejudices of dualism. Instead of accepting as basic, as dualists do, an already abstract presupposition of the ontological bifurcation of reality, we are asked to return to the perceptually rich world of phenomena, to the pre-linguistic, pre-cognitive experience of being-in-the-world. Though admittedly very difficult to do, given the absolute authority of dualism that is apparent in our very attempt to conceive of, or articulate our basic encounter with the world, it is not impossible. The justification for the attempt of the phenomenological reduction is that neither wholly subjective nor objective accounts can justify their initial ontological/epistemological bias. There simply is not the pre-cognitive, perceptual evidence adequate to claim that the world is composed of items of experience that are already "factual" prior to experience or that subsequently attain certainty upon their transcendental reconstitution in consciousness. Our fundamental experience of the world reveals the world as strange and paradoxical and not, therefore, completely transparent to understanding. If it were utterly intelligible, then we would never experience the tension that sometimes exists between phenomena and our representations of those phenomena. The point I am attempting to make is that we inhabit a very rich perceptual realm prior to its cognition which becomes problematic only if we assume the basic truth of dualistic hypotheses. The fact that the world at times appears so complex, so resistant to its easy schematizing, is that it is "right there" in perceptual experience before we deduce or infer its possibility:

It does not await our judgement before incorporating the most surprising phenomena, or before rejecting the most plausible figments of our imagination. Perception is not a science of the world, it is not even an act, a deliberate taking up of a position; it is the background from which all acts stand out, and is presupposed by them. The world is not an object such that I have in my possession the law of its making; it is the natural setting of, and field for, all my thoughts and all my explicit perceptions. Truth does not "inhabit" only the "inner man", or more accurately, there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself. When I return to

myself from an excursion into the realm of dogmatic common sense or of science, I find, not a source of intrinsic truth, but a subject destined to the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, pps. x-xi).

What Merleau-Ponty is suggesting is that what purely subjective or objective accounts overlook is that their very grounding is parasitic on the relation between subject and the world that is always revealed in primordial perceptual experience. In fact, the only way that rationalism, for example, can justifiably claim that representations cohere in understanding, and further that they have "validity rather than existence", is that they make reference to a lived, perceptual world. As he puts it : "The world is precisely that thing of which we form a representation, not as men or empirical subjects, but in so far as we are all one light and participate in the One without destroying its unity" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.xii). To maintain an idealist coition between things and the thought of those things (especially when those things are relegated to a plane of fully determinate, reductionistic existence - a mode of existence different in kind from subjective existence if one accepts the Cartesian view) is, therefore, difficult at the perceptual level. There simply is not anything in perceptual experience that can justify the polarization of subject and object. This is what the attempt of the phenomenological reduction intends to reveal:

(that) because we are through and through compounded of relationships with the world that for us the only way to become aware of the fact is to suspend the resultant activity, to refuse it our *complicity* (italics mine)... to put it "out of play". Not because we reject the certainties of common sense and a natural attitude to things - they are, on the contrary, the constant theme of philosophy - but because, being the presupposed basis of any thought, they are taken for granted, and go unnoticed, and because in order to arouse them and bring them to view, we have to suspend for a moment our recognition of them... Reflection does not withdraw from the world towards the unity of consciousness as the world's basis; it steps back to watch the forms of transcendence fly up like sparks from a fire; it slackens the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus brings them to our notice...(it is not the rationalist conception which) *makes use* of our relation to the world, which is the motive force of the transcendental deduction, and makes the

world immanent in the subject, instead of *being filled with wonder* at it and conceiving the subject as a process of transcendence towards the world. All the misunderstandings (concerning the interpretation of the phenomenological reduction to the perceptual world)... have arisen from the fact that in order to see the world and grasp it as paradoxical, we must break with our familiar acceptance of it and, also, from the fact that from this break we can learn nothing but the unmotivated upsurge of the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, pps.xiii-xiv).

What is common to any dualistic interpretation of reality is, then, that, in so favouring an utterly subjective or objective account, it overlooks the very ontological grounding of the subject/object relation: experience of the world. This is what the phenomenological reduction aims to reacquaint us with: the intentional threads that link us to the world. Though a truism, consciousness must be consciousness of something. Not even as solipsistic a philosophy as that of Descartes can possibly maintain an absolutely pure interiority. What thought could you possibly have if it did not make reference to something other than the self? Arguably, the most important facet of Merleau-Ponty's metaphysics is his discussion of the logic of situations which keys on the pre-eminent status of the *relationship* between "self" and "world". For Merleau-Ponty, our existence is best understood as a constant involvement in circumstances. In every concrete situation, we are faced with circumstances to which we must relate and for which we must attempt to work out some sort of principle for activity. And it is crucial to acknowledge that our relation to the world is not a relation to a pre-determined set of "facts". The world is to be seen as nothing more than a significant *field* for creative exploration, something which invites our open-ended participation in the joint generation of meaning. The world is not some distant realm lurking behind concepts to which we must make blind reference in the hope that it is there. Rather, the world is the setting for our all our explicit activity. It is not given to us so much as we are given to it.

To every situation, there is what might initially appear to be a clear-cut division of subject and object, but which is more accurately characterized as activity and passivity. "Subject" and "object" have traditionally been the simple means for elucidating this dialectical movement; yet they are only

heuristic, linguistic concepts for explaining the elusive process of meaning generation. Sam Mallin (1979, p.10) has done as good a job as anyone in attempting to shed light on this very basic, yet so slippery pre-cognitive ontology of situations:

The agent is faced with sets of indeterminate and ambiguous elements that demand attention but which he can never finally determine or control and a vague and uncertain awareness of his capacities to handle the situation. His purpose is to articulate and clarify it to the maximum. But this struggle to understand the situation is equally the attempt to work out a principle of action that will both organize its diverse elements and establish his role in respect to them. It is a principle that comes into being only in the action itself, never verbally or self-consciously, and reappears whenever it is required in similar situations.

If it is not already obvious, I would like to stress how radical a departure the ontology of situations is from the dualistic understanding of reality. That there is a basic structure to the world that resists our full determination of its meaning - its significance as an eventful *field* for exploration is given in its perceptible patterning - is assured in its activity. Yet our activity is also ensured in that we must develop ways of interpreting phenomena so as to make them at least partially determinate. But since this is all revealed in a whole temporal movement of the dialectic, we can never claim the absolute activity or passivity that justifies the rigid polarization of subject and object. To put it otherwise, what both idealism/rationalism and realism/empiricism fail to recognize is that what is now the active pole in a situation quickly becomes the passive pole in a whole existential rhythm. The former's obsession with the absolute activity of subject is deficient in that, if there were nothing beyond our subjectivity, there would be no struggle to organize our resistant environment; and if we suppose, as the latter does, that we are only passive towards the world, that every truth is immediately given independently of any subjective input, then we would not experience the frustration at the thwarting of our intentions and purposes; indeed, we could not entertain a position at odds with the world's, could not have any intentions of our own. "There is, then, a dialectic between the two sides of a situation. In order to understand or experience one side, one must take the other into consideration: the subject's concerns



only become available if they are triggered or secured by the setting and the setting can appear and be conspicuous only in so far as it resists these concerns" (Mallin, 1979, p.12).

Perhaps what it is about Merleau-Ponty's philosophy that holds so much appeal for transpersonal ecologists is that phenomenology permits the world to enjoy the subjecthood that has always been considered the exclusive purview of humans. His description of being-in-the-world is so appealing, not just because it suggests that we are forever bodily engaged in concrete situations wherein we must structure our experience, but that we must do so in conjunction with the world's purposes and intentions. As Merleau-Ponty constantly reminds us, we can get nowhere without the world, cannot reduce the world to something immanent in consciousness; rather we must recognize its "opacity and transcendence" (1962, p.xvi). The Logos of the world - the foundational intentionality that connects self and world and is manifest in contextual encounters - is never a unilateral process, but a flexible communication between an engaging other and a responsive self. Yet, there is a proviso: we must allow the other its "otherness", must never arrogantly assume that we can have full cognitive possession of it. Though the world is always there as an inalienable presence, its transcendence is made clear in its resistance to its full determination and reification. As Merleau-Ponty often puts it, the indubitability of the world does not translate into the indubitability of the thought of it.

In order to get to the heart of what Merleau-Ponty means by the world's "opacity and transcendence", it might prove beneficial to approach perceptual experience within the framework of Gestalt psychology. If one brackets objective accounts for a moment and allows the world to reveal itself, I think it can be maintained that "objects" are not nearly as determinate as science would have it. One perceives the object slipping away, becoming less focal and indeterminate as it recedes back into Being, retreats to the horizon. Yet the whole situation is so rich in perceptual detail that another Gestalt, a focus against a horizon, quickly forms seemingly in and of itself. Is this merely a momentary lapse in the subjective control of the situation, an instance of inattentiveness, or might it indicate that the other is re-establishing its active, participatory role in the dialectical movement of the encounter? Recalling that there is no such thing as a foolish question in philosophy, is there really anything else intrinsic to the specific perceptual context that could account for the contingency of the

"object's" status? Is it not just possible that the subject's inability to group given perceptual phenomena adequately, to fully delineate an "object", is not so much the result of a subjective defect as it is the world's transcendence becoming apparent? Is there anything basically wrong with viewing the focus-horizon-focus-horizon rhythm as the natural manifestation of the dialectical movement of existential experience?

If your response is in the negative and you view this enterprise as so much ontological rubbish, then I suggest that you consider one final question: is this account any more ludicrous than maintaining that reality is the product of the point-by-point intellection of discrete, fully determinate monads that only acquire true existence in a self-conscious, constituting act by a transcendent consciousness? Where is the evidence in perception for the valid deduction of the rightness and appropriateness of the inductive method itself? To my mind, this particular criticism would seem to make dualistic accounts as ontologically indefensible as phenomenology is supposed to be. Even worse, perhaps, if you consider that science cannot account for our basic *experience* of the world while, by contrast, phenomenology can account for the way in which objects begin to take shape in experience.

An argument that Merleau-Ponty sets up against himself is that the difficulties his critics have with his characterization of the pre-personal, pre-cognitive perceptual realm is that it is so "conversational". His descriptions of the most basic contextual encounters are always framed in terms of proffered invitations from phenomena to work out meaning and forge significance, but pre-linguistically. But how on earth can you have meaning without concepts that abstract away from the immediate encounter? Is Merleau-Ponty simply employing some metaphysical sleight-of-hand?

Perhaps the best way of answering this is that he does not have any profound difficulty with the application of concepts to phenomena - they are, after all, imperative for cognition and transpersonal communication. What, however, he does find difficult to maintain is that essence precedes existence, and that one can, therefore, have complete cognitive possession of an object simply by receiving its properties: to the point even that the object "X" has no "thingness" beyond a catalogue of perceptible qualities corresponding to subjective sensations. As he states it (1962, p. 319): "The unity of the thing beyond all of its fixed properties is not a substratum, a

vacant X, a subject in which properties inhere, but that unique accent which is to be found in each one of them, that unique manner of existing of which they are the second order expression."

What, in particular, Merleau-Ponty finds "dishonest" about science - and this cannot be over-stressed - is that it always, already has a strategy in place for characterizing any situation as a situation of a distinct type which may be subsumed under a generalization. It perhaps may not be the case that science is deliberately, self-consciously attempting to dupe us, but it most certainly is the case that it does assume that the world is already replete with discrete objects that can be known through the computation of fact one + fact two + fact three and so on. For Merleau-Ponty this is "dishonest" as it simply is not a faithful characterization of our most basic perceptual encounters with Being. As he very nicely and simply puts it: what science overlooks in perceptual experience is that "richness and clarity are in inverse proportion to each other..." (1962, p.318). Science is, consequently, guilty of grossly oversimplifying and distorting what is in fact a very rich perceptual field. It overlooks that, in the very "projection" of properties, by means of concepts onto the "object", the object has already been reduced and determined in the very act of making it "objective". The object, then, is not an open-ended phenomenological grouping, as Merleau-Ponty would see it, but a structure that is pre-supposed cognitively and abstractly and then claimed as derived from experience. In short, science has gotten it wrong: essence does not precede existence and cognitive patterning cannot be assumed to precede perception.

There is a question to be raised, however: can phenomenology account for how such an ontological position could have arisen? What Merleau-Ponty would argue is that the scientist does not actually perceive in any manner different in kind from that of the phenomenologist. Both are engaged in a dynamic, evolving context that unfolds through a series of temporary Gestalts. What is now focal undulates onto the horizon in a seamless existential rhythm to be replaced by another Gestalt. Where the scientist errs is in negating the virtual rhythm of the situation by both taking only the most salient features of the encounter and then, having formed an "appropriate" concept for the fixated focus, now an object, places that concept in a timeless transcendent, noumenal realm. The abstraction is then taken to be more real than the context wherein it was acquired; moreover, it is then assumed to have universal, neutral application to any

future contexts resembling the initial situation. This having been achieved, every last vestige of the intentional threads connecting us to the world are erased from memory. And what is more, the fully determined object may then be culled as resource in an air of indifference. The scientist is, then, able to justify and even make imperative the development of that resource as he views its full determination as coming from the world, rather than himself. He, thus, fully abjures himself from the responsibility that would come from the acknowledgement of himself as the actual source of the object's fixation.

Where Merleau-Ponty's ontology so radically diverges from the scientific worldview is in its reversal of the essence/existence sequence. What he makes abundantly clear is that the pre-personal, perceptual world exists right there before the determination of the essence of any thing: existence precedes essence. The task of the perceiving subject is, consequently, to work with the phenomena that summon him and invite his situational participation in the joint working out of the significance of the contact. And what might seem startling, given that we are talking about the pre-cognitive, pre-conceptual world, is that the language that is most appropriate to the dynamic setting always seems to be in terms of an on-going conversation between engaging other and embodied self. Against the unilateral imposition of abstract concepts that effectively makes Being mute for the scientist, Merleau-Ponty always characterizes the situational encounter as one wherein phenomena summon us, speak to us. Instead of the thing being a vacant X that is assumed, but not truly known to exist behind the properties that a subject perceives, the thing is seen to be an equal, participatory interlocutor in the working out of the meaning of the situation. As Merleau-Ponty views it (1962, p.xx):

The phenomenological world is not the bringing to explicit expression of a pre-existing being [one that already possesses an immutable essence] but the laying down of being. Philosophy is not the reflection of a pre-existing truth, but, like art, the act of bringing truth into being. One may well ask how this creation is *possible*, and if it does not recapture in things a pre-existing Reason. The answer is that the only pre-existing Logos is the world itself, and that the philosophy which brings it into visible existence does not begin by being *possible*; it is actual or real like the world of which it is a part, and no explanatory

hypothesis is clearer than the act whereby we take up this unfinished world in an effort to complete and conceive it. Rationality is not a *problem*. There is no unknown quality which has to be determined by deduction, or, beginning with it, demonstrated inductively. We witness every minute the miracle of related experiences, and yet nobody knows better than we do how this miracle is worked, for we are ourselves this network of relationships. The world and reason are not problematical.

That language, and therefore the employment of abstract concepts may seem, initially, to be forcing us away from direct experience and into some universal, noumenal realm of truth is not problematic for Merleau-Ponty. Though it may seem devious or at least inconsistent to claim that phenomenology can get away with this movement while science cannot is best understood by appeal to Merleau-Ponty's process-based ontology of situations. As we may recall, the dynamic, evolving context is best understood as an existential, rhythmic waxing and waning of focal points against a horizon. But whereas science attempts to enframe what is now focal, to gather together the most blatant aspects of the Gestalt in order to create an abstraction that is universally, necessarily true independently of any concrete context, the phenomenologist seeks only to articulate what is now only a significant, yet ephemeral, grouping of perceived phenomena in *virtual* (non-objective, lived) time.

What Merleau-Ponty's detractors fail to recognize is that, though his notion of structuring - sedimentation seems to bear a resemblance to abstract, objective cognition - what he is describing is an equal participation between self and world in the process of the articulation, laying down of Being, bringing truth into Being. In contrast to the scientist's distanced, neutral stare which seeks to reduce and quantify matter, the epistemic stance associated with phenomenology is that of wonder, attentiveness and curiosity: he wants to listen to what significant, animated beings are telling him. The conversational setting, then, is known to be fully open-ended and the possibilities for new approaches to, and perspectives of, any context inexhaustible. The self reaches out towards the world which seems so ineffable, and yet so familiar, in order to sediment an approach appropriate to the given situation. But though the process of sedimentation aims at developing an approach that may be recalled in contexts of a similar nature

so that the other may be approached more adequately, less tentatively the next time, the self is always fully aware that the context is an on-going, evolving process of temporary Gestalts. The self knows that the inexhaustibility and ambiguity of the situation will continue in the future, even though it has been made specific as a situation of a certain type, with a distinct flavour, and that, consequently, the self must accommodate the new aspects of the situation by altering his sedimented structure. In future situations of a similar nature, he will discern the failure of his sedimented structure to adequately capture the new circumstances, but will be afforded the opportunity of modifying the structure so as to make it more appropriate to the renewal of acquaintance. He must improvise on the previously established meaning in order to maintain meaning and rejuvenate the significance of the encounter. If the schemata is to retain meaning in the future, "if this skeleton is to live, it will have to acquire flesh and blood" (van den Berg, 1972, p.82).

Within a Gestalt paradigm, sedimented structures, like scientific abstractions, do admit of a plurality of instantiations in contexts resembling that of their initial generation, yet they are far more flexible and improvisatory. For although both attempt to make a present focus determinate, sedimentation always takes place in the realization that any focal point is located on a horizon of possible future encounters and that, consequently, any interpretation of the moment must be tempered by that fact. The structure, then, must always be re-cast so as to never become separable from its evolving, focal source. Where a case may be made for scientific conceptualizations being inauthentic is that they belittle the importance of this temporal, hermeneutic up-dating. The scientific project is to make the original focus universally, eternally true; it, therefore, dismisses as inconsequential the horizontal possibility of further determination and articulation in future settings. This is what allows the scientist to "enjoy" such a neutral, objective stance towards the world: in order to fully explain any situation, all he has to do is to recollect and then apply the standard, received interpretation, now a full-blown concept, to the "object" that stands opposite to him and amenable to his manipulation.

The difficulty, however, as the phenomenologist understands it, is that a scientific concept, stripped from its meaningful inherence in concrete situations, becomes vitiated, hollow. To paraphrase a constant theme in Merleau-Ponty, such concepts are inauthentic because they have become

fixated at the level of their primary sedimentation. Attached for all time to what is assumed to be a fixed, determinate object, but which is, in fact, only a temporary, situational focus, they lose the meaning that can only be provided by the spontaneous activity of an improvising subject. The scientific obsession with establishing cognitive correspondence between a fixed object and its concept and in making that agreement eternal, as far as phenomenologists are concerned, only results in fixated concepts becoming increasingly meaningless since, with each successive use, they are removed from the only source that can make them meaningful: the concrete context. As most people have observed at some point: the more you repeat a word, the more meaningless it becomes with each successive use. It does really seem to retreat to the horizon, to re-establish its otherness by concealing itself from the gaze "as blank and pitiless as the sun".

## Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to examine the ontological underpinnings of dualism and its attendant resourcism and anthropocentrism. The fundamental assumption has been that the world is not some distant, neutral realm replete with fully determinate monadic essences whose existence is reduced to a question of its possible determination by a transcendent constituting consciousness. By contrast, the world, it was reasoned, was considered to be alive, diverse, complex and animated by significant, vibrant beings right there! But, by the same token, it was argued that, though Being is an engaging presence whose existence is indubitable, we cannot translate this indubitability into the indubitability of our thoughts about it. All we can do is attempt to delineate its temporarily focal movements to some degree before it retreats to the horizon, asserts its opacity and transcendence, its subjective activity.

The over-all framework for pursuing a more environmentally-appropriate ontology than that which is traditionally derived from rationalism and empiricism was provided by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. It was argued that the only way to overcome dualistic assumptions was to re-examine the "natural attitude", to suspend our recognition of "things" that we take for granted. Reflection was, therefore, re-drawn as penetration into the world rather than as retreat into the unity of consciousness as the world's basis. The mood or epistemic stance associated with the relaxation of the natural attitude so as to regard it was

suggested to be that of wonder and curiosity. For wonder slackens the intentional threads bonding us to the world (the Logos of Being), thus bringing them to attention. With such an attitude, the world reveals itself as strange and paradoxical - certainly not a distanced idea thoroughly transparent to reason, and, therefore, wholly self-consistent and self-contained. The reason why our thoughts can never fully delineate the world and exhaust its meaning and significance is that the world is continually in flux; contexts emerge and dissolve before their full determination. So we are always perceptual beginners, and, thus, can never take anything for granted. All we can do is to creatively articulate a present context before it retreats back into Being.

The reason that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology was seized on as the best means for elucidating transpersonal ecology, ecocentric care and concern, was that his description of facticity, of the primordial situation could not be a more thorough rejection of dualism. Against the hegemony of science, he summons the primacy of lived experience. The phenomenological reduction, consequently, endears itself to the transpersonal search for a damaging rebuttal of dualism and its attendant resourcism. And further, what was argued is that transpersonal care exists before its epistemological proof and moral justification.

I thought that a review of the essentials of the transpersonal experience might just show to what degree they mesh with Merleau-Ponty's ruminations. As we recall, transpersonal ecology refers to the "this-worldly realization of as expansive a sense of self as possible in a world in which selves and things-in-the-world are conceived as processes". From Merleau-Ponty, it is clear that the first condition "this-worldly" is not just met, but insisted upon by the very nature of his description of bodily engagement in Being; the transpersonal dimension exists pre-personally through the experiential body in immediate, concrete situations. Further, the self is not a monadic Cartesian ego. The self points toward the world and, through perception, attempts to elicit the essence of its relationship with the Other. The self, in its bodily intentionality, must maintain an openness towards, an intimate observation of (not in the sense of sight, but in the sense of proper conduct), an awareness of, and alertness towards Being, if communication is to be achieved. The role of the self is to: establish patterns and relationships; forge meaningful contexts; maintain a humility in the face of the other with regards to the inexhaustibility of the situation (which amounts to both the



engaging quality and transcendence of the other); and foster care and concern while accepting an answerability in the process of meaning-generation.

The final condition laid down by transpersonal ecology, that "things-in-the-world must be conceived as processes", too, was dealt with. This is a crucial issue because the very grounding of dualism is that subject and object interact as static, universal ideas. But, by contrast, for transpersonal purposes, the fluidity of Being must be observed if the appropriate attitude of answerability, care and concern is to be fostered. Again, this was not problematic for Merleau-Ponty. For the movement of self, attending the authentic attitude, is not scientific: neither linear, progressive, hierarchical nor the transcendence of personal-interpersonal life. It is but an opening, extending and deepening of the self through Self-realization! And it is known from the very first moment of the sedimentation of an approach to Being that any meaning generated in the ever-horizonal context is always open to further articulation and improvisation; hence, there is no possibility of meaning become fixated as it is in scientific conceptualization. Consequently, things-in-the-world and their symbiotic cognitive patternings are never static, but forever eventful. There may be hope yet for the eradication, or at least erosion, of the arrogant hegemony of the resourcist enterprise.

## 2 TRANSPERSONAL ECOLOGY AND PHENOMENOLOGY: THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL SITUATION

The primary intention of Chapter One was to acquaint the reader with the basics of Transpersonal Ecology and to indicate how those basics are perhaps given their strongest philosophical grounding in phenomenology. Against traditional rational objective philosophy, it was maintained that an appropriate ecocentric metaphysic is arguably best achieved by a self realizing itself through a progressive broadening and deepening of self in a world in which selves and things-in-the-world are conceived as processes. By means of a description of how the phenomenological reduction re-acquaints us with the preobjective, prelinguistic, precognitive realm at the most basic perceptual level, we were introduced to the bodily contact we always have with Being in situations that are already meaningfully structured prior to any cognitive thematization of that engagement on the part of the self.

What however was not dealt with in sufficient depth was how a self can possibly have a meaningful exchange with others at the most immediate, prelinguistic level of bodily perception. The very important question that remains to be answered, then, is how communion, and more important at this juncture, communication, is possible between a participatory self and an engaging other. The difficulty resides in the fact that, by whatever phrase you characterize the perceptual level of experience - as contact with the world as a "meaning environment", or as a "relational totality of experience" (Jones, 1989, p.76) - such experience is prelinguistic and therefore inexpressible. How then can one maintain that a fundamentally mute, or perhaps gestural, situation is already replete with significance when that significance is ineffable? The immediate reply would seem to be that there exists some subjective Kantian "synthesis of the manifold of representations" which acts as a filter determining our cognitive delineation of the setting which is then articulated in language. Though such a thesis is plausible, it is not necessary to mount such an account. It is possible to provide a phenomenological approach that details how significance in concrete contexts is perceived and is then translated into linguistic expression without the positing of a transcendent subject, a subject that Kant makes imperative for the purposes of his argumentation.

It is the purpose of this chapter to more fully flesh out the basics of the phenomenological experience of the world in order to maintain that one does not need to argue in any objective rationalist manner to account for the translation of mute experience into a fully blown interpretation/linguistic expression of that experience. The major assumption is that all authentic nomination, expression, whether written, spoken, mute or gestural, is a creative, improvisatory aesthetic act occasioned by the perception of significance in, the acknowledged value of the engagement with, Being. The substantive body of the chapter will, consequently, be taken up with an examination of how phenomenological description is fundamentally an authentic poetic thrust into the nature of Being and beings-in-the-world. The justification for such an undertaking is that poetic nomination reflects the revelatory power of Being at the moment of consummation of participating self and engaging other, when Being is allowed to presence itself, to resonate in its infinite modes of expression, and is respectfully permitted its opacity and transcendence.

The very strength of poetic expression as a means for capturing the significance of the world as a "meaning environment" would appear to be two-fold; for, on the one hand it may be seen as a philosophically significant alternative to dualism in that it does not conceive of the world as an assemblage of distinct objects with predetermined essences and, on the other hand, does not employ words inappropriate to a context on any utilitarian grounds, in order to, say, evoke emotions, for example. It simply attempts to capture the mood or flavour of a present context and, as such, is phenomenologically authentic. It nominates Being, shapes the world and we experience the truth of this expression. It summons Being and focuses our attention on the over-arching *Logos* or structure of engaging Being and participating self entwined in the primordial situation. Ultimately, poetry elucidates the transpersonal ecological call for respectful heedfulness by showing how self and world are always mutually engaged as equal interlocutors in the establishment of meaning. For by its very nature, it illustrates that authentic articulation involves a listening stance on the part of the self, a responsible opening of the self to Being's proffering of a revelatory gift.

The true import of poetic, creative expression in the context of the present chapter and indeed the entire remainder of the thesis, as it will be reasoned, is that it presents one particular model (the other being that of

music, as will be seen in Chapter Four) for attempting and achieving the transpersonal ecological goal of Self-realization!

Before launching into the project of this chapter, however, I want to introduce one more item into this situating preamble. What absolutely needs to be expressed is that it is the major contention of this dissertation that not only is the transpersonal ecological attitude grounded in an epistemology and ontology which is steadfastly non-dualistic, but that it may be best characterized as thoroughly *aesthetic*. What, moreover, will be assumed is that at the heart of phenomenological description, the terms *invitation* and *response* can be seen to be of inestimable value in the explication of how ontology, epistemology, ethics, and perhaps most important, aesthetics are all rooted in prepersonal primordial contact with Being. Though seemingly odd, idiosyncratic terms, "invitation" and "response" are to be seen as important re-interpretations of the traditional conceptions of subject and object. And rather than acting as discrete objects forever fixed, fully delineated and polarized by linguistic convention, they will be presented as fluid frames of reference, "processes" as transpersonal ecologists employ the term to characterize Self-realization!. As such, they will be considered to be but moments in the dialectical movement of Being which do not really exist save abstractly. It will also be reasoned that they co-evolve contextually, continually renew and rejuvenate their joint context and are not, therefore, separable (as dualists insist).

Beginning with a brief hermeneutic return to the ontological findings of Chapter One, the chapter will then proceed to cast such findings within a broader metaphysical context which will focus on the relationship between ontology and epistemology, and, thus, to a detailed consideration of how mute perceptual acknowledgements of significance form the basis for "higher" order cognitive expressions in language; in short, how creative articulations are epiphytic on the epiphanous. Throughout, moreover, the contrast between the phenomenological countenance of the significance of Being and the scientific objectification of Nature will be highlighted.

Moving phenomenologically, what will be argued is that, at the most basic moment of prepersonal, precognitive engagement with Being, all authentic nomination begins from an epiphanous revelation of Being in which the intentional threads linking us to the world are made evident in an *aesthetic* acknowledgement of Being, a moment in which a hand is

extended, an existential invitation is proffered and accepted. The moment is thereby consummated and an indissoluble situational bond achieved, established and sedimented for all time. And what might be seen as most interesting is that the communication/communion generated at the moment of union between invitation and response is shot through with an *answerability* which is usually considered to be the most genuine and binding of moral accountability in traditional ethical theory. This present interpretation of the term, however, is in no way to be aligned with such a literal way of thinking. What I mean to suggest is that the positive valuation of a meaningful discourse between embodied self and engaging other carries with it an implicit, tacit agreement on the nature of the comportment associated with the communion that is always forward looking towards renewal and rejuvenation. *Answer-ability* is not to be equated with a pathological retreat into a forced obligation to adhere to abstract ethical rules, but with a "steadfast friendliness", a voluntary, mutual agreement to forever deepen the relationship when the situation is appropriate and consensual. There is nothing truly extraordinary about this. It is unquestionably a stance that grounds every normal interaction between self and world if one truly wants to belong.

It is the purpose of this chapter, then, to explore the relation that obtains between prepersonal engagement with Being and beings-in-the-world, the attitude or comportment associated with the phenomenological observance of such an ontological perspective, the creative expression of that interrelation and, finally, the positive valuation that one may attach to the sense of belonging that is animated and reinforced by renewed situational encounters.

### **Science and the Nature of Being**

The central difficulty that phenomenologists have with science is that, rather than grounding its fundamental ontological and epistemological position on basic perceptual experience, it, perhaps naively or unintentionally, already abstracts away from lived experience when it attempts to justify its initial metaphysical bias. This is particularly problematic in that no matter how sophisticated one's synthetic, totalizing abilities might be, there really does not seem to be any convincing argument for such a theoretical, abstract approach save by appeal to a more basic, immediate perceptual encounter wherein beings-in-the-world have

revealed themselves as already meaningful. Why this is philosophically self-destructive is that it involves circular reasoning. Put simply, the main deficiency of empirical science is that it already has a strategy in place for subsuming facts under a generalization in the absence of an account for its overall "meaning horizon" and then goes even further to claim that its meaning horizon is derived from the computation of those very facts. Yet for those facts to have had any significance in the first place, there had to be some tacit assumption/conceptualization of a generally meaningful pattern of interrelation which could justify their effective, theoretical synthesis. Empirical science is, therefore, rendered self-defeating by its failure to heed one of the basic tenets of logic: one cannot maintain that one's conclusion is entailed by the argument when that conclusion has been operative from the start. In other words, one cannot consistently maintain the inductive validity of one's argument when one is, at the same time, operating within a philosophical framework that is implicitly deductive. For one's inductive generalization to carry weight, one must have already possessed a preliminary conception of what one's methodology might yield, a Janus-faced methodology that is at once inductive and deductive.

In his book, *Reading the Book of Nature* (1989), Edwin Jones argues that the difficulty that empirical science has with the inductive/deductive distinction rests with its failure to come to terms with a crucial distinction lying at the heart of ontological speculation. Following Heidegger, his ontological schema emphasizes that the conundrum facing empirical science may be resolved by a reconsideration of the distinction between "the being of entities in their significance" and the "world as a relational totality" (p.64). As will become more clear in the next section, empirical science's central deficiency is that it overlooks the significance, the "worldhood" of individual beings as they present themselves to an embodied self. The main argument is that a self that is not contextually situated cannot countenance the existence of the world as a meaning horizon and cannot, therefore, break free from the tendency to neutralize and totalize the experience of particular beings - which is why the scientist may often experience a tension between his inductive methodology and his worldview.

A difficulty central to ontological speculation arises when one attempts to seriously come to terms with the notions of world or nature in general in contrast to the individual beings which comprise that world. The objective scientific world or "nature" is traditionally "conceived as isolated from

specifically human concerns; it is independent of human will, pre-established, and inexorable" (Jones, 1989, p.66). As such, then, it cannot be perceived as a whole phenomenon. It is only through an effective, totalizing synthesis of particular, individual phenomena that a world can take shape around us. Yet, as we saw above, this begs the question: how can one posit such a vacant viewpoint which justifies the synthesis when we lack a prior unifying image of an all-encompassing phenomenon, a world?

Heidegger's response to this dilemma was to distinguish two senses of the term "world" - one *ontic* and the other *ontological* - which are commonplace in scientific discourse (Jones, 1989, pp. 67-74). In the first sense, the *ontic* world is that "world" which stands as the conglomeration of individual entities each with their own specific, objectively given properties. Such a viewpoint assumes that it is proper to adopt an utterly dispassionate, neutral view of entities so that the world so constituted may appear in and of itself, in the absence of subjective concerns which might otherwise colour and distort present phenomena. Within this *ontic* conception of the world, then, it is made clear that, ideally, the observer should not participate, but merely let phenomena in isolation yield their essential, objective characteristics. Even with the advent of quantum physics and the uncertainty principle, such an attitude still prevails in the scientific community.

By contrast, the *ontological* world refers to Being in its broadest sense. In its *ontological* sense, then, "world" is the ultimate background against which all specific *ontical* systems particularize themselves. All *ontic* conceptions delineate a world in which discrete entities cohere in a relational totality. Any *ontic* existent will, consequently, be inspected within its appropriate context with regards to its specific relational functioning with other existents of a like nature. Yet, at the same time, all such existents still have actual being in the *ontological* sense; all partake of a world beyond their specific *ontical* meaning horizon. They, therefore, do not exist merely as symbolic functions operating in a circumscribed relational totality, but really and truly exist in the *ontological* sense. *Ontic* characterizations are deficient, then, in that they disregard the primary *ontological* status of the particular existent. The logical morass in which empirical science finds itself, as it was stated above, stems directly from the conflation of the *ontic* and *ontological* senses of "world". One simply cannot operate within an *ontical* framework and then claim that one's findings confer *ontological*

status. From the outset, one must have an ontological conception, a sense of what the world or Being is like before ontic entities can be subsumed under a generalization, can function within a relational totality.

This oversight has serious epistemological consequences for empirical science. As we have seen, the scientific method proceeds by first inspecting individual entities for their objective properties, trusting that certain objects of a similar nature may be *inductively* joined together to form greater complexes or events, to eventually create a world. Being logically-empirically derived, the projected synthesis is taken to justify an hypothesis which can then be falsified or verified, with the ultimate result that the nature of the original entities can be *deduced* from the hypothesis. Though it is assumed that the method is "neutral" and that, therefore, it acknowledges the real, ontological being of individual entities, such an acknowledgement is only a desultory, propitiatory gesture. This can be evinced by the fact that, even prior to the hypothesis, the putative ontological entities have already been logically constructed as "in-themselves". This is no mere sleight-of-hand, but constitutes an "epistemological crisis" (Jones, 1989, p. 71).

This transcends the mere conflation of the ontic and ontological as it utterly collapses the distinction between epistemology and ontology. It makes the world utterly transparent to a transcendental constituting consciousness. It peremptorily transforms worldly beings into dependent objects. Moreover, it violates the whole purpose of positing hypotheses in that, in common with all ontic conceptions, entities are to be approached as components existing within a prescribed relational totality, a context, and not as ontological absolutes. Within an epistemological context, ontic findings are meant only to yield *doxa* (belief), not *episteme* (certainty).

Curiously, this epistemological crisis was anticipated, to some degree, as early as Galileo:

...his own commitment to experimental methods, and thus to inspection, prevented him from adequately interpreting the ground of his achievements. Because the structuring principles of physical nature could not themselves be first discovered by experimental means, but rather were required from the start in order for those methods to work, he quite honestly posited them as assumptions and



deferred dealing with the impossibility of attaining their own verification *a posteriori* that is, experimentally (Jones, 1989, p. 72).

Heidegger referred to this mode of access to the world as "circumspection" due to the way in which entities disclose themselves, not just as "they look in themselves, but rather in their significance, that is, as related to other items in the complex and the complex as a whole" (Jones, 1989, p. 73). The value of circumspection to empirical scientists should be clear as it does not conflate the ontic and ontological senses of "world", or collapse the distinction between Being and meaning. Rather, in being an admittedly prescientific attitude, it makes no claim to yielding *episteme*, but what Husserl called the "doxic certainty of the typical style of the natural world as it emerges within the life-world horizon" (1989, p. 73). Heidegger, however, did not limit circumspection to the ontical world, but felt that the experiential access to the world available through circumspection was "a genuine and original openness to a relational totality in its ontological character that he called 'significance' " (1989, p.73).

Circumspection is important to Heidegger, then, in that, not only does it provide ontological access to the world of scientific understanding, but the "life-world... the worlding of the world" (what Merleau-Ponty calls the *Logos* of the primordial situation, as we shall see presently). Moreover, it also allows for a second distinction between the ontic and ontological worlds. In the second formulation of the ontic world, the word "world" does not just refer to entities made present to inspection, nor even to their synthetic totality. Rather, "world" is recast as a world already pregnant with sense, already structured as a "meaning environment" in which entities present themselves as significant beings "to be dealt with". Following Heidegger's reasoning, it should come as no surprise to discover that the final conception of world, "world" in its second ontological sense refers to the ultimate horizon of the life-world, the "worldhood" of the world. It is the source or ground of all the existential possibilities for experience open to us as humans, the relationality totality of all our involvements - affective, perceptual, cognitive, moral, aesthetic, practical - and, in the final outcome, is deeply personal, familiar, that by which we encounter significance and conduct ourselves appropriately.

## The Logos of Being

As was seen in Chapter One, one can get nowhere with Merleau-Ponty's ontology and epistemology without a thorough grasp of his notion of situation. At root, Merleau-Ponty employs the term in the everyday, expressive, non-technical sense we all understand: involvement in circumstances which demand our attention and activity. Faced with ambiguous, indeterminate, perhaps even paradoxical elements in a novel situation, an agent must attempt to develop some principle of action which is appropriate to the setting. Moreover, "it is a principle of action that comes into being, only in the action itself, never verbally or self-consciously, and reappears whenever it is required in similar situations" (Mallin, 1979, p.11). For a child, appropriate activity keys on the very simple practice of either manipulating or avoiding those things that are present in the specific setting. Yet, for the adult who also faces the same array of invitations or obstacles, the meaning of the situation is significantly different as he "...attempts to obscure and deny it by interpreting nature as consisting of nonsituational entities or things-in-themselves" (Mallin, 1979, p.11). Constrained by conceptual frameworks, the adult must make a concerted effort to bracket such abstract superstructures in order to rediscover the primacy of perceptual engagement in immediate experience.

The point to be gleaned from this is not that there is a radical difference between the activity of the child and the activity of the adult, but that only certain features of the situation will be selected as relevant to the situated individual. The compulsion to activity in certain settings therefore seems to be rooted in the fact we always have concerns which may be triggered, not by third-person facts or neutral states of affairs, but by the figural salience of the situation. In short, there will always be situations that have "...undeniable relevance for me and already contain 'lines of force,' meanings or patterns" (Mallin, 1979, p. 12). But, and it cannot be over-stated, patterns of significance do not stem solely from the *subject* or *object* side of the situation, but only in the eventful context itself. To echo the findings of Chapter One, the situation cannot be understood in subjective idealist terms as, if there were nothing beyond subjectivity, we would never encounter a resistant environment; nor can it be understood in any realist fashion, as the only way that the world can appear is through its opposition to our individual, subjective interests and intentions.

To reject the bifurcation of the situation into an object-side and subject-side is not to suggest that there are no meaningful structures contained in the situation however: the argument against such dichotomies is simply that we rely too heavily on psychological accounts and "...objective-scientific criteria as the only acceptable norms for establishing the validity of meanings" (Jones, 1989, p.4). Paradoxically, though, when one brackets such abstract objective-scientific modes of analysis, we are nonetheless faced, prelinguistically and preconceptually, with a situation that contains structures that are undeniably present and relevant to our concerns as long as we maintain an openness to the situation's meaningful unfolding. As Edwin Jones (1989, pp.4-5) captures it:

The importance of such *structures* is, perhaps, worth stressing, for they are what render phenomenological description something other than impressionistic. Indeed, the precedence that description takes over argumentation in the phenomenologist's methodology is based on the insight that human life is animated by structures that are imbued with significance, that are "pregnant with *sens*" as Merleau-Ponty says, but that nevertheless are neither logically nor linguistically shaped; their significance is "prepropositional." As such, they are not deduced, but rather uncovered, or "disclosed," by whatever descriptive means the phenomenologist commands. Here, as with any explication, the "proof" lies in our "seeing" the sense of what is laid out. In any given case phenomenological description may go wrong. But then, too, it may subsequently be made right, precisely because it is directed toward and indeed restrained by, such inherently meaningful structures - as, for example, Husserl's "eidetic structures," Merleau-Ponty's "gestalten," and Heidegger's "existential," or even, in the case of an aesthetic critic, a "work of art."

It cannot be overstated that Merleau-Ponty's delineation of the significant situation should never be interpreted in terms of a transcendental relation between a subject and object, but always in terms of his descriptions of embodiment which perhaps, though authors such as Sam Mallin (1979, p. 32) would object to this, are best understood in terms of Gestalt theory. Though it is difficult to do, given our conceptual/linguistic traditions, "subject" and "object" are best to be viewed as a self-transcendence towards a worldly presence in a situation which is already *meaningfully* structured precognitively at the perceptual level. Yet, the

situation is meaningful only to the degree that the outwardly moving self attempts the meeting in the full recognition that the other's being involves, not just an invitation to engagement, but an "otherness", an opacity and transcendence, that must be respectfully acknowledged; there is, then, a temporality, a rhythm to the situation, culminating in a splitting off, an *ecart*, from the encounter as the other reaffirms its otherness and retreats into concealment, undulates from present focus to the horizon. This is essential to the dialectical movement of the situation, the fundamental *Logos* which reveals itself as a series of Gestalts which, ultimately, once set into a motion as a dynamic, dialectical process of continual becoming, *ekstase*, will truly make situations equally participatory and conversational.

What lies at the heart of the perceptual situation is a group of structures that constitutes the subject's facticity or thrownness and establishes the indissoluble union of subjectivity and otherness. Such "thrown" structures as light-dark, large-small, soft-hard and rough-smooth are neither given to a subject, nor do they constitute his existence; rather they "have Being 'running through them' or are necessarily open to otherness" (Mallin, 1979, p.34). Grounding self-transcendence towards the world, they are always in contact with otherness "...to the extent that any new structure that is created in the future is, simultaneously and correlatively, both an articulation of these thrown capacities and an articulation of the world and otherness" (Mallin, 1979, p. 34).

At root, such structures, then, are always "for-another" and have relative degrees of generality or specificity. What this means is that, as a subject forges new specific structures, they will conform to the more general thrown structures inherent in the situation. The delineation of a future setting, then, will be circumscribed by the primordial *Logos* of the situation, will be determined to be an instance of a structure which always partakes of a more general, fundamental structure rooted in Being. There is, consequently, no such thing as an absolutely "free" structure, no matter how seemingly revolutionary the articulation of a novel situation. Creative expressions always stand in relation to thrown structures as species to genera. In contact with otherness, then, any specific structure will partake of a more generalized form already prefigured by the *Logos* of Being. In every situation, therefore:

...the otherness of a particular field is able to as Merleau-Ponty says demand, solicit, contact or motivate exactly the structures most appropriate to it and which give the subject the maximum possible grasp of this field...the field itself sorts out the most general structures and then works through their hierarchies until the most specific structuration to which the subject is open at that moment is selected and concretized (Mallin, 1979, p. 35).

What is of crucial importance here is that structures are never purely subjective nor totally independent of otherness. This is most forcefully evident in Merleau-Ponty's theory of *horizons*. All potential structures exist horizontally and are sedimented by the more general structures that ground each and every present situation. Thus, whether a potential structure is concretized or not, it is never empty. It always exists as an open-ended invitation to articulation proffered by the "other" by the very *Logos* of the situation. Reality, for the most part, is not limited to the concretization of focal entities, and the sedimentation of their meanings, as science would have it, but is, in the main, openended, ambiguous and indeterminate. Furthermore, as it was seen in Chapter One, no matter how narrowly and specifically we delineate, fix or structure a present focal entity, the openendedness of the situation will always maintain an inexhaustibility which affords the opportunity for creative re-interpretation of sedimented structures in every potential structure of a similar general nature lying on the future horizon. Moreover, it must be stressed that, at this most fundamental level, the situation is only "operationally intentional," not "thetic intentional." Since thetic intentionality makes definite claims or judgments about objects, it belongs to the cognitive realm, rather than preobjective, precognitive realm of primordial perception. Though parasitic on the operational intentionality inherent in the perceptual situation:

Idealism (like objective thought) passes by the side of true (*veritable*) intentionality which *belongs to (est a)* its object rather than posits it. Since belonging to (*etre a*) is the subject-side of being-in-the-world (*etre au monde*), operative intentionality's essential characteristic is to be outside of itself through its inherence in otherness. This is why Merleau-Ponty says '(operative intentionality) renders the first (thetic intentionality) possible and is what Heidegger calls transcendence' (Mallin, 1979, p. 38).

Another misunderstanding of Merleau-Ponty's concept of the situation can be seen in the attempt of his critics to maintain that his use of intentionality is seriously flawed. Their reasoning is that, since intentions are ontologically grounded in concrete situations, intentionality and the intentional object must be "real" existents. This, however, clearly only serves to expose the bias of those who presuppose an objective understanding of things as existing in themselves, of those who maintain an analytic attitude towards Being, a prejudice of the world as existing in-itself. As we saw above, however, the criticism misses the mark as it fails to heed that objective cognition represents a sublimation of the preobjective relation of the subject to the world. As Sam Mallin puts it:

we can hardly say that the situational relation or its object-side exists in this naive physical, causal, or objective fashion. Rather, it is real in the same sense that we might say being-in-the-world is real or that our thrown inherence in otherness is real. We have seen that the situation has the primordial ontological status of having the reality of Being and not that of beings (1979, p. 39).

Merleau-Ponty's critics are, therefore, guilty of failing to acknowledge the *ontological difference* between Being and beings, the distinction, respectively, between the ontological world as a relational totality and the ontic world of beings, to reiterate Heidegger's schema outlined earlier. The intentional object should never be confused with the physical object; nor should intentionality ever be understood as anything but the *ek-stase* of embodied self and engaging other in concrete situations.

### **The cluster of concepts central to Merleau-Ponty's theory of situations**

Merleau-Ponty says that his entire phenomenology is meant to be a reduction to the lived and preobjective realm wherein *primordial contact* is disclosed. The necessity of undertaking the reduction is to "bracket" all of the presuppositions we have concerning our relation to Being and its understanding. His central difficulty with science, in particular, is that it "forgets" that all of its second-order, abstract conceptualizations make reference to, are indeed parasitic upon, the more basic perceptions that a subject has at the preobjective level in the primordial situation. As a result of this "forgetfulness", science takes objects to be more real than the perceptions which ground and sustain them; which make them truly

meaningful at the level of cognition. The purpose of the reduction, then, is, as we have seen, to recapture and describe the *sens* (meaning) arising from the intentionality existing between embodied self, the body subject, and the engaging other which is inherent in the *Logos* of the world. The subject is not a disembodied, distanced, isolated ego that stands in opposition to the world as objective reason would have it, is not a subject that occupies a quantifiable space in a definite location, but a body that exists "as a system of possible actions, a virtual body with its phenomenological 'place' defined by its task and situation. My body is wherever there is something to be done" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 250).

What, moreover, is revealed in the primordial situation is that the other is not encountered as a mere component in a system of discrete, atomistic objects, each with determinate, eternal essences, as but a single datum that coheres with other data in understanding, but as an interlocutor, an equal participant in the determination of the *sens* of the context. It is impossible to improve on Merleau-Ponty's own words:

Prior to and independently of other people, the thing achieves that miracle of expression: an inner reality which reveals itself externally, a significance which descends into the world and begins its existence there, and which can be fully understood only when the eyes seek it in its own location. Thus the thing is correlative to my body and, in more general terms, to my existence, of which my body is merely the stabilized structure. It is constituted in the hold which my body takes upon it; it is not first of all a meaning for the understanding, but a structure accessible to inspection by the body, and if we try to describe the real as it appears to us in perceptual experience, we find it overlaid with anthropological predicates (1962, p. 320).

The *Logos* of Being establishes the *primordial contact* between a *thrown* subject destined to the world wherein the other is encountered in its full palpable presence, its visibility and unconcealedness. The phenomenological reduction, then, reveals the other, not as thing that is cognitively posited as having *factuality* through the possession of a group of fully determinate properties, but as a presence that has *facticity*, resonance as an engaging interlocutor. The other, then, is not an *in-itself* as idealists maintain, but as the correlative of an embodied subject as a conversational

partner is, paradoxically, an *in-itself-for-us*. Again, Merleau-Ponty's own words cannot be improved upon:

... every perception is a communication or a communion, the taking up or completion by us of some extraneous intention or, on the other hand, the complete expression outside ourselves of our perceptual powers and a coition, so to speak, of our body with things. The fact that this may not have been realized earlier is due to the fact that any coming to awareness of the perceptual world was hampered by the prejudices arising from objective thinking. The function of the latter is to reduce all phenomena which bear witness to the union of subject and world, putting in their place the clear idea of the object as *in itself* and of the subject as pure consciousness. It therefore severs the links which unite the thing and the embodied subject, leaving only sensible qualities to make up our world (to the exclusion of the modes of appearance which we have described), and preferably visual qualities, because these give the impression of being autonomous, and because they are less directly linked to our body and present us with an object rather than introducing us into an atmosphere (1962, p. 320).

What the phenomenological reduction, or as it may also be characterized, "(a) letting go... an archaeology of the subject" (Madison, 1981, p. 63), ultimately yields, then, is a consciousness which always finds itself already at work in the world. The primordial "fact", or more appropriately, "value-fact" (in that it is perceptually significant, not cognitively neutral) is that there is a simultaneity of perceiving subject and perceived world. Subjectivity is *the project of the world* and the world is the logic of the world at the heart of the subject. The relation between the subject and the world is not a "conceived" relationship, but an ontological one; it is not a relationship of knowing, but a relationship of being.

As we saw earlier in the chapter, Merleau-Ponty utterly rejects realism, in fact even assumes that "it has been dealt the death blow" (Kwant, 1963, p. 65), on the grounds that it entails, at its core, self-contradiction. Science forgets that entities are not ontologically basic, but are derived from a conception of the whole which is given to us preobjectively through the *Logos of Being*. "We experience first the whole, and from this we proceed, by means of an analysis, to the elements. We then assume that these elements are prior and that they enable us to reconstruct the whole (Kwant,



1963, p. 66). The tenacity of realism is such, though, that even some Gestalt psychologists assume that the world can appear to us objectively, independently of any subjective input. They, thus, overlook the fact that subject and world always imply each other. The subject is nothing more than *the project of the world*, and the world is the living, *invitational* space for the subject. The subject can no more be isolated from the world than a focus can be separated from its horizon in a Gestalt. Meaning can only, and does only, emerge from their on-going conversational engagement.

Central to the understanding of the *Logos* of situations is that at all times the intentionality obtaining between subject and world forms an all encompassing Gestalt. Since we are *openness* to the world and the world is open to us because we are access to the world, since self-experience and experience of the world are inseparable, "...it is a contradiction to experience the world and, at the same time, to abstract from access to the world which we ourselves are" (Kwant, 1963, p. 68). As openness is one of the most important concepts in existential, as opposed to psychological phenomenology, it is imperative to elucidate what it is and what it is not:

When Merleau-Ponty says that we have an '*openness to being* which is perceptual faith,' he means that not only that our thrown regions enable us to experience Being as it is, but that Being itself *compels* us to experience it. The subject's essential power to disclose Being is frequently taken in the idealist sense that our transcendental capabilities can be activated at will or are entirely due to a projection by the subject. But we have seen that this view is mistaken, for in being open the subject is also '*not closable*.' 'With the first vision,...there is initiation,...the opening of a dimension that can never again be closed.' The subject cannot escape or stop the '*demands*,' '*interrogation*,' '*saturation*,' and '*penetration*' of Being. He must always be in a situation and every situation has otherness. 'There is always something before him, a being to be deciphered, an *omnitudo realitatis*' (Mallin, 1979, p. 61).

Openness, then, is a stance that is never closable. Due to his thrownness, facticity, the subject is forever an affective, libidinal vector directed towards significance, the other that is resolutely, carnally right there. Through self-transcendence, the subject opens to the world as an *invitation* or question. And correlatively, the world presences itself as an *acceptance*, as a reply. In

simply *being there* as something and not nothing, the other engages as a resonance. As Kwant captures it:

The world always presents itself either as a reply to the question which we are and, consequently, as meaningful, or as a failure to reply and, consequently, as meaningless. It is wholly inconceivable that we would first know the things in themselves, pure objectivity, and that we would experience them as a reply only in the second place. At their very first appearance things already assume the character of a reply (1963, p. 68).

It is often objected that this description of primordial contact may be taken as an example of extreme subjectivism, even solipsism (Kwant, 1963, p. 69). The reasoning is that: a) the way in which openness is characterized, the other is made to respond to the question asked of it, yet does not reveal what it is in itself; and b) even if the other is deemed to have otherness, to be an *in-itself* at least to some extent, such a concession is merely perfunctory, since, as Merleau-Ponty's ontology claims, the other is an *in-itself-for-us*. In response to both charges, Merleau-Ponty would argue that it is based on a serious misunderstanding of the concept of openness. Though, as a subject, I am absolutely particular, the *Logos* of the world, preobjectively, structurally determines me to be absolutely universal. Through the phenomenological reduction, I encounter myself, not as an *eidos* with predetermined properties, but as a thrown structure, a *body-subject* whose identity constellates through the process of self-transcendence towards the world in concrete situations. As he puts it:

In all uses of the word *sens*, we find the same fundamental notion of a being orientated or polarized in the direction of what he is not, and thus we are always brought back to a conception of the subject as *ek-stase*, and to a relationship of active transcendence between the subject and the world. The world is inseparable from the subject, but from a subject that is nothing but a project of the world, and the subject is inseparable from the world, but from a world which the subject itself projects. The subject is a being-in-the-world and the world remains 'subjective' since its texture and articulations are traced out by the subject's movement of transcendence (1962, p. 430).

Put otherwise, the essence of a subject is best treated as a process of continual becoming (*ek-stase*) wherein the subject only comes to know himself as a question in the reply which he comes to know as the world. The question is revealed in the answer supplied by the other. The other, then, is resolutely an "otherness" through which I acquire the *sens* of myself, is truly an in-itself-for-me; and by the same token, I am nothing but a resonance for its opening.

That the world is not a subjective projection is also given further weight by the fact that, not only is there not nothing, but something, but that the world separates itself from Being in general, presences itself as a figure against its ontological ground, forms a Gestalt. In order to achieve its appearing, its opening, the other must solicit, invoke the subject's innate powers of articulation to creatively, faithfully express the other in its present focal emergence. It cannot be over-stated, however, that the focus is not to be rigidly cognized, made fully determinate as an object possessing a limited range of essential properties. Focal points are not to be understood in any objective, analytic manner as a linear series of discrete, indivisible now-points, but as an experiential series of "fields of presence" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 415) in which every present contains the past and future, and every perception blends with or resolves into another. Every present, then, is essentially a moment of revelation or disclosure in the whole *ek-stase* inherent in the dialectic interpenetration of self and other.

Though they will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Four, the concepts of protension and retention should be mentioned here. Every present, as we have seen, contains structures sedimented in the past as *retentions*. Moreover, although it might be tempting to claim that, since the future may only be viewed as a wide-open field of potential structures, and is, consequently, essentially empty, this cannot be maintained as it contains *protensions* or "lines of intentionality which trace out in advance at least the style of what is to come" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 416). In the present, Merleau-Ponty says:

I do not so much perceive objects as reckon with an environment; I seek support in my tools, and am at my task rather than confronting it...They do not run from a central *I*, but from my perceptual field itself, so to speak, which draws along in its wake its own horizon of retentions, and bites into the future with its protensions. I do not pass

through a series of instances of now, the images of which I preserve and which, placed end to end, make a line (1962, p. 416).

With this schematization of time in hand, we are now in a position to come to terms with the notion of *inexhaustability*. As we have seen, the "field of presence" does not consist of totally discrete things-in-themselves, for every object is imbedded in an irremovable background and, thus, is tightly interwoven with every other entity in the field as an existing or potential Gestalt. Temporality, however, makes this situation far more complex. In that subject and world are intentionally bound to each other in every concrete situation, but that the situation is forever in flux due to the *ek-stase* of time, it is crucial that, when the other presences itself at peak focal moments in order to articulate itself against the background of sedimented retentions, the subject make the attempt to creatively express the moment of contact to the greatest extent possible. In order to break free from the shackles of inherited meanings sedimented in the past which, if used, can only serve to stagnate the meaning of the contact in their facile, automatic repetition, the subject must rejuvenate the significance of the encounter which has been altered through the *ek-stase* of time by means of *authentic* language that is *appropriate* to the current setting before it resolves to the horizon as a field of future protensions. Given the *ek-stase* of time, and, hence, the dialectical rhythm of situations, there is a necessary splitting off, *ecart*, of the object as the present Gestalt resolves onto the horizon as the next Gestalt crystallizes, and gains ascendance. The *sens* of every Gestalt, then, is, by its nature, inexhaustible, yet requires the creative input of the improvising subject if it is to retain significance in the present. Meaning and significance are, therefore, to be seen as contingent upon the appearing of the other and its creative articulation by the subject in every setting. *Sens* can only arise through the equal participation of subject and other in its institution.

### **The Logos of Expression**

In his paper, "Merleau-Ponty and the Voice of the Earth" (1988), David Abram very nicely and succinctly provides the required substantive link between the *Logos* of Being and the *Logos* of expression. Following my sketch of Merleau-Ponty's ontology of situations above, he writes that perception is an "...inherently creative, participatory activity - a sort of conversation carried on underneath our spoken discourse, between the

living body and its world" (1988, p. 101). Every situation, then, is permeated by a "...silent or prereflective perception (which) unfolds as a reciprocal exchange between the body and the world...(and which, though essentially open-ended and indeterminate) is nevertheless highly articulate, already informed by a profound logos" (1988, p. 116). Thus, though it might be assumed that language occurs only at the level of objective cognition, such a view would be mistaken as "...it is born of our carnal participation in a world that already *speaks to us* at the most immediate level of sensory experience" (1988, p. 117). Thus, though linguists, in common with all scientists, assume that the relation of subject and world has its transcendental analogue in the analytical relation of word and concept, they are forgetful of the fact that thought and speech are parasitic upon a conversation already underway at the preobjective, perceptual level, are oblivious to the "...gestural, carnal resonance that informs even our most rarefied discourse (Abram, 1988, p. 117).

To again cite Abram, the relation between the *Logos* of Being and the *Logos* of expression, as it is revealed in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological investigations, may be encapsulated in the following way:

1) The event of perception, experientially considered, is an inherently interactive, participatory event, a reciprocal interplay between the perceiver and the perceived. 2) Perceived things are encountered by the perceiving body as animate, living powers that actively draw us into relation. Our spontaneous, preconceptual experience yields no evidence for a dualistic division between animate and "inanimate" phenomena, only for relative distinctions between diverse forms of animateness. 3) The perceptual reciprocity between our sensing bodies and the animate, expressive landscape both engenders and supports our more conscious, linguistic reciprocity with others. The complex interchange that we call "language" is rooted in the non-verbal exchange already going on between our flesh and the flesh of the world. 4) Human languages, then, are informed not only by the structures of the human body and the human community, but by the evocative shapes and patterns of the more-than-human terrain. Experientially considered, language is no more the special property of the human organism than it is an expression of the animate earth that enfolds us (1996, pp. 89-90).

Clearly however, though we are inextricably linked to the world perceptually and preobjectively, we do possess other modes for approaching the world: affectively, cognitively, morally, practically and the like. It is the intention of this section to examine the connection Merleau-Ponty makes between perception and cognition through the elucidation of his description of how the silence of the perceptual realm is miraculously transformed into articulate speech, how mute, yet significant gestures emerge from the silence of primordial contact into the affective soundings of conversational engagement.

At the outset of chapter six of *Phenomenology of Perception*, entitled "The Body as Expression and Speech," Merleau-Ponty iterates that the role of the body-subject is to appropriate the centres of meaning occurring in an immediate situation through the process of self-transcendence; and nowhere is this more evident than in linguistic practice. In turning his attention to the phenomenon of language, and in attempting to show its significance as bodily expression of a particular kind, his stated aim is to overcome, once and for all, the classical dichotomy between subject and object, between idealism and empiricism (1962, p. 174).

The empirical theory of language argues that the connection of words into sentences is a natural process governed by psychical laws of association. The basic assumption is that words are not produced by a *speaking subject*, and that we only possess "verbal images," the traces left in us by words spoken or heard. Due to the laws of neurological mechanics, an external auditory stimulus triggers a process of association in us wherein the stimulus is attached to its appropriate verbal image" eventually resulting in the articulation of a word. "There is (then) no speaker (but merely) a flow of words set into motion independently of any intention to speak...speech is not an action and does not show up the internal possibilities of the subject: man can speak as the electric lamp can become incandescent" (1962, p. 175).

The intellectual theory of language, though it does not deny the existence of a subject, is deficient in that it conceives the subject as solely a thinking subject replete with concepts and categories prior to speaking. Thus, although there is a subject, there is no *speaking subject*, for the proper life of the subject, his thinking existence, precedes speech and is independent of it. This, in principle then, means that the mere possession of a clear and distinct idea will always result in its immaculate performance

in speech. The speaking subject, then, is merely a chimera, thought having already been completed by the thinking subject.

The difficulty that Merleau-Ponty has with both theories, then, is that they are equally at a loss to supply an account of speaking other than in terms of involuntary action. The word, however, is not just a passive shell waiting to be supplied with content by a transcendental ego or causally determined by external stimuli. He argues that:

If speech presupposed thought, if talking were primarily a matter of meeting the object through a cognitive intention or through a representation, we could not understand why thought tends towards expression as towards its completion, why the most familiar thing appears indeterminate as long as we have not recalled its name, why the thinking subject himself is in a kind of ignorance of his thoughts so long as he has not formulated them for himself...a thought limited to existing for itself, independently of the constraints of speech and communication, would no sooner appear than it would sink into the unconscious, which means that it would not exist even for itself (1962, p. 177).

With regards to thought and speech, then, there appears to be a division between the two as the thought is assumed to be universal and unchanging while language is deemed to be historical and evolutionary. It is thought that their interrelation is arbitrary, contingent. Intellectualism takes it one step further by claiming that word is only a symbol established by convention and not by any necessary connection obtaining between thought and expression. Taken further, this means that thought exists prior to its expression and, therefore, has an existence independent of language. The fact that the same thoughts may be articulated in a myriad of different languages is held to lend credence to this assumption. Yet, it would seem that we often appeal to another language, not to translate a current thought, but to express the thought in the only way it can be articulated. Aware that certain thoughts are really and truly not accessible in our native tongue, we appeal to another. We simply cannot "think" the expression in any other way: thought and expression are, consequently, absolutely inseparable.

Attending to our experience, we know that this is true. We do not first possess a complete thought and then go in search of the words appropriate

to its expression. By contrast, thought seeks the words necessary for its fruition in the way a work of art seeks an audience to fulfil its communicative *telos* or the other seeks a subject for its articulation in the primordial situation. In each case, there is an operative intentionality already at work which provides the grounds for the thetic, neutral intentionality occurring at the level of cognition. To know something is to express it. To the degree that our expression is vague so will our thought remain. The argument can be presented thus:

Anyone who is accustomed to teaching knows this from his own experience. As long as he is unable to explain his thoughts very clearly, there is something lacking in his understanding of the problems involved. It happens also rather frequently that a thought assumes form precisely because it is verbally explained, so that the lecturer himself arrives at a clearer understanding precisely through his verbal expression (Kwant, 1963, p. 51).

As Merleau-Ponty states it: "the denomination of objects does not follow upon recognition; it is itself recognition" (1962, p. 177). This can be clearly evinced in the case of learning by children. Children do not first possess a clear and distinct concept which they apply to things through some self-conscious synthetic act. Rather, like poets, they bring truth into being through the act of speaking; by nominating Being, the thing is miraculously animated: "The word, far from being the mere sign of objects and meanings, inhabits things and is the vehicle of meanings. Thus speech, in the speaker, does not translate ready-made thought, but accomplishes it. *A fortiori* must it be recognized that the listener receives thought from speech itself" (1962, p. 178).

Even if this much may be conceded, though, an idealist or realist might argue, it is still the subject who imbues his own words and sentences with meaning; hence, there is still the problem of inter-subjective communication. Might it not be the case, then, that in hearing the words of another, there might be a causal connection between external stimuli and internal meanings which is transcendently deciphered? Predictably, Merleau-Ponty replies in the negative. For the objection to work, it would have to be maintained that the subject already possesses a clear and distinct idea which can be stimulated by another's speech as, if he did not, there could not be anything for the incoming stimulus to trigger and only



misunderstanding could result. This is patently absurd for the reason that, if it were true, we would already know everything in advance and would not, indeed could not, ever learn anything. His reasoning is that:

...we have the power to understand over and above what we may have spontaneously thought. People can speak to us only a language which we already understand, each word of a difficult text awakens in us thoughts which were ours beforehand, but these meanings sometimes combine to form new thought which recasts them all, and we are transported to the heart of the matter, we find the source. Here there is nothing comparable to the solution of a problem, where we discover an unknown quantity through its relationship with known ones. For the problem can only be solved if it is determinate, that is, if the cross-checking of the data provides the unknown quantity with one or more definite values (1962, p. 178).

In short, what Merleau-Ponty is arguing here is that, though we always possess a stockpile of sedimented structures, meanings that have been culturally and historically fabricated and then acquired, we are always, by our very nature, predisposed to understanding variations on those meanings as they are creatively improvised upon, broadened and deepened, through the novel expressions of authors and philosophers. By some sort of process of identification with the author (in the sense of like-feeling, and not, therefore, abstractly and cognitively), we reach thoughts that we did not previously have. Through exposure to their writings, we gradually insinuate ourselves into their manner of thinking, into their modes of presencing which finally culminates in understanding. The thought then is most assuredly in the expression. If we simply accepted words as having lexical definition, transcendental correspondence to concepts which must be deciphered for comprehension, we would never successfully attain a grasp of another's thinking. Moreover, it is not just the case that we become acquainted with a new thought because known words and their known meanings are connected in a new fashion. It is not like erecting a building out of the remains of another building that has been razed. Rather, every articulation is unique in that it is summoned by a situation that has not and cannot exist again in precisely the same form. Knowing this is to know why and how articulations are authentic, appropriate to their immediate context. As Remy C. Kwant views it:

At first sight, it may seem strange that the meaning of language lies contained in the language itself. The improbable character, however, of this assertion is considerably lessened, if we pay attention to the other forms of expression used by the human body. Dancing is a form of expression, yet no one would dream of distinguishing the meaning of the dance from the dance movements. Likewise, we know very well that the meaning of a painting cannot be divorced from canvas and colors or the meaning of music from the sounds. In general, the meaning of an expression finds existence in the material itself of the expression. Why would the situation be different with respect to verbal expression - words? (1963, p. 52).

It should come as no surprise that, in keeping with his ontology of situations, Merleau-Ponty must reject any dualistic presumption of words existing independently of thought. A word is not a "sign" that makes reference to some extrinsic content, but is thought itself. The relationship between thought and word is not, therefore, something which is transcendently established, but emerges immanently; hence, a word does not fix meaning, but is meaning itself. To illustrate this, he employs a musical analogy:

The musical meaning of a sonata is inseparable from the sounds which are its vehicle; before we have heard it no analysis enables us to anticipate it; once the performance is over, we shall, in our intellectual analyses of the music, be unable to do anything but carry ourselves back to the moment of experiencing it (1962, p. 182).

Just as the tones are not "signs" of the sonata, but are the sonata itself meaningfully unfolding, words are not the "signs" of thought, but is thought meaningfully expressing itself. In the case of both linguistic and musical expression, then, there is no vehicle or medium required to translate some noumenal idea lying behind the experience into a form in which it can be understood as meaningful. The tones are the music's meaning and the words are the linguistic expression's meaning. Furthermore, the attitude associated with both the linguistic and the musical experience is not one of appropriating or annexing some cognitive content, but of establishing contact with the immediate presence, whether it be music or an interlocutor. At the heart of both experiential situations there lies invitation and response, question and answer. The movement of

self-transcendence towards the other undertaken by the subject is not aimed at the acquisition of some abstract reward, but is essentially a trial of encounter, in both the sense of an attempt and an ordeal.

Phenomenologically, it is but an instance of primordial contact between embodied self and engaging other. Though only speaking about language, the following quote from Merleau-Ponty can be extended to also embrace music:

As soon as man uses language to establish a living relation with himself or with his fellows, language is no longer an instrument, *no longer a means; it is a manifestation, a revelation of intimate being and of the psychic link which unites us to the world and our fellow men* (1962, p. 196).

To truly come to grips with just how radical a departure Merleau-Ponty's ontology and epistemology in general, and theory of language in particular is from traditional metaphysics and linguistic theory, I will close this section with some concluding remarks that fulfil his aim stated earlier: to leave the traditional subject-object dichotomy behind us, once and for all. The central difficulty, for dualists, idealists especially, is that they tend to be preoccupied with issues of entailment, with questions of the necessity or falsifiability of conclusions reached through syllogistic reasoning. The obsession with literal meanings and with laws concerning the validity and permissibility of propositions, however, needlessly simplifies and distorts their view of language. They simply cannot countenance that, in the vast majority of verbal exchanges, there are metalinguistic forces at work creating a field of significance, an atmosphere that transcends the literal meanings exchanged in conversation. What their linguistic theories prevent them from perceiving is that:

There is...a taking up of others' thought through speech, a reflection in others, an ability to think *according to others* which enriches our own thoughts. Here the meaning of words must finally be induced by the words themselves, or more exactly, their conceptual meaning must be formed by a kind of deduction from a *gestural meaning*, which is immanent in speech (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 179).

Though it may be belabouring a point, I think that it cannot be over-stated to just what degree immanent or implicit meaning pervades expression and

militates against its transcendental codification as literal and explicit, and as permissible or impermissible. The objectively rational, scientific view of expression maintains that:

expression is most complete when it points unequivocally to events, to states of objects, to ideas or relations, for, in those instances, expression leaves nothing more to be desired, contains nothing which it does not reveal, and thus sweeps us toward the object which it designates. (Yet) in dialogue, narrative, plays on words, trust, promise, prayer, eloquence, literature, we possess second-order language in which we do not speak of objects and ideas *except to reach someone* (italics mine)... (objective, analytic thinking denies this as it) attaches clear and precise significations to fixed signs. It fixes a certain number of transparent relations and, to represent them, it establishes symbols which in themselves are meaningless and can therefore never say more than they mean conventionally. Having thus protected itself from the shifts in meaning that create error, objective reason is in principle assured at any moment of being able to justify its claims by appealing to its initial definitions (Merleau-Ponty, 1973, pp. 3-4).

This distinction between the ready-made nature of objective expression and authentic articulation can be evinced by the approach we take to the writings of an author we have not encountered before. In reading, for example, Joyce, Nabokov or Faulkner for the first time, we do not assume a transcendental, interpretive stance wherein we attempt to decipher the work's meaning. The words on the page are not the imperfect husks of an array of transcendental clear and distinct ideas as rationalism would have it, but an invitational field. As such, the meaning of a book is given, in the first instance, not so much by its ideas as by:

...systematic and unexpected variation of the modes of language, of narrative, or of existing literary forms. This accent, this particular modulation of speech - if the expression is successful - is assimilated little by little by the reader, and it gives him access to a thought to which he was until then indifferent or even opposed (Merleau-Ponty, 1973, p. xiii).

Expression in literature, then, is not the transmission of *a priori* certainties or empirical data, but is an evocative invitation. Through some form of

mimesis, we insinuate ourselves into, and share the particular gestural significance and all-embracing world of the novel. We feel, bodily, the author's style of thinking; our lives intertwine in a present situation which suddenly takes on anticipation, develops a historicity. Moreover, the process is not just limited to the reader's approach, but to the author's own act of creation. The author does not stand by idly paring his fingernails while admiring his handiwork as does Joyce's God. Rather, as a midwife, a medium, he brings truth into being by means of a vocabulary that he may have had no idea he possessed. The beauty of language, according to Merleau-Ponty (1973, p. 10), is that its meaning does not require the transcendent fusion of referent with reference as the scientific view would have it, but seamlessly and invisibly transports us towards the meaning of another subject's thoughts. There is nothing extraordinary about this as we encounter it all the time in conversation. Gestures, smiles, hesitations create an atmosphere, a mood which transcends the simple linguistic analysis of what information was imparted and how it was received. This seems to be obvious in that often, even most of the time, the initial expression cannot be reproduced verbatim, yet the meaning is retained. The beauty of language, again, lies in its capacity to pass unnoticed.

### **The Paradox of Creativity**

Just as the phenomenological reduction reveals the *Logos* of the ontological situation, so, too, does it disclose the *Logos* of the epistemological situation, the primordial source of meaning and expression. In radical opposition to traditional epistemological theorizing which attempts to explicate how we can transform a confusing world of muddled, indistinct and ambiguous sense-data into a world of closed significations, phenomenology views the descent into the prepersonal, precognitive realm as profoundly liberating. For it is the only way to escape the cliched, banal, jargonistic, stultifying world of closed significations. The reduction to the originating source of meaning, the *Logos* of the situation, has the effect of liberating words from their stagnant morass, of reactivating the creative impulse behind their initial authentic nomination, and, thus of renewing their significance. The movement of self-transcendence towards the world in the primordial situation is absolutely bound up with this renewal of meaning and significance through authentic self-expression. As Merleau-Ponty puts it: "In its live and creative state, language is the gesture of renewal and recovery which unites me with myself and others" (1973, p. 17).

In that communication has this intersubjective, reciprocal character, moreover, it is clear that there is not, cannot be, an isolated, monadic Cartesian ego indifferently affixing referents to references, as the very nature of speech presupposes a commonality of intentionalities and meanings which require openness and self-transcendence. We also notice that, when speaking with another, the intention to express is "empty in the sense that it is not committed to specific words, but organizes around itself - polarizes - available meanings, both incarnating itself in them and at the same time modifying them" (Bannan, 1971, p. 83).

There is a most interesting corollary to the inseparability of self and other in the linguistic delineation of the situation: if one accepts the Cartesian view, then the pure "I" must posit an object of its own fabrication before itself. But, if we "take embodiment as a given then the thoughts that arise in speech may be attributed sometimes to oneself and at other times to others" (Merleau-Ponty, 1973, p. 18). In fact, the equal participation of self and other in, and the perceptual integration of, the situation is such that:

speaking and listening, action and perception, are quite distinct operations for me only when I reflect upon them...When I am actually speaking I do not first *figure* the *movements* involved. My whole bodily system concentrates on finding and saying the word, in the same way that my hand moves toward what is offered to me...When speaking or listening, I project myself into the other person, I introduce him into my own self (Merleau-Ponty, 1973, p. 18).

Language, then, is not a prison wherein we must scramble to find the word appropriate for the expression of a discrete thought as there is no such existential split. Such a split only comes after the fact in the theoretical analysis of what has already been wrought in conversation. One cannot have a pure thought independently of its linguistic performance. As F. Joseph Smith (1979, p. 85) asks: "Do words really just lie about in a mental dictionary waiting for us to use them to match our thoughts?" It would not seem so. I do not first have an auditory perception which is then translated into thought. Rather, I am invited into an engaging situation so equally participatory, that I cannot tell what issues from me and what comes from my interlocutor. Activity and passivity are, thus, indissolubly fused. Both speaker and listener share a passivity in that they share sedimented structures, inherited meaning structures; yet, by the same token, they are

actively engaged in improvising a common modality. Moreover, in the institution of new meanings through the revitalization of sedimented meanings, there is also a thrust toward anticipated reinterpretations upon renewed contact in the future.

Central to expression, then, is that it has a temporal dimension - it reinterprets meanings sedimented in the past in an improvisational present in which the anticipation of a further reworking lies on the open-ended future horizon - and is, clearly, a profoundly creative and authentic activity. Expression does not move in solitude, delineating objects and events point-by-point as scientific intellection would claim. Each facet of the eventful situation is created, conjured into existence through the engaged cooperation of self and other. We are not truly communicating if we treat words as empty vessels requiring cognitive ballast, as mere linguistic tools which have utility rather than significance; and we are not communicating if we assume that there is such a thing as completed expression. True speech animates objects; it moves by sketching differentiations, not by establishing representations, forging and fixing correspondences.

What is so distasteful about the latter enterprise is that scientific conceptualization so absolutely determines a meaning, so imperiously sediments an experience in the attempt to establish the universal validity of a proposition or hypothesis, that the existential communion with others which language facilitates is brought to a close. The world's luminosity vanishes at the flick of a switch. Rather than having a playful, intersubjective field for participatory improvisations on meaning and significance, we are left with a disjunctive assemblage of neutral facts and stagnated meanings. Severed from their roots in the primordial *Logos* which sustains meaning by inviting creative improvisation, objective conceptualizations become vitiated and inauthentic through their monotonous repetition in, and indifferent application to, a myriad of settings. In assuming the validity and necessity of scientific propositions, we effectively debar significance and value from the eventful, participatory situation. As we reach for an apple, we do not reach for an object in need of representation, but move intentionally towards a centre of value. This requires no second-order explanation or definition.

There is always a Gestalt of language. In the living present, there is always ontological revelation and concealment, disclosure and closure which is reflected at the cognitive, linguistic level as that which is expressed

and unexpressed. Since the present focus - revelation, disclosure or expression - always retreats to the horizon of concealment and non-expression through the *ek-stase* of time, there is always an open field of potential articulations, improvisational meanings; there is always work to do. This, perhaps more than any other issue, establishes the *aesthetic* nature of articulation and expression. Expression is temporary, but contains past and future. Hence, it behooves the articulating subject to re-animate sedimented meanings through creative, aesthetic expression at the instant of revelation. In the linguistic situation, the subject, in a sense, is put on the spot the way a jazz musician is made to improvise on sedimented harmonic structures unfolding through the *ek-stase* of musical time. Afforded the opportunity to engage the significant other, the musician makes the leap of self-transcendence in one single, integrated aesthetic act. Consequently, it must be seen that every present contains a dimension of response and *answer-ability* which is at once both *moral* and *aesthetic*. Every authentic present signification, therefore, takes place under an umbrella of moral and aesthetic value already prefigured into the concrete context. The reactivation of the initial sedimenting event is, therefore, clearly ethically and aesthetically value-laden. If it were not, we would not experience the compulsion to respond to the invitational beckoning of the other.

For anything - an expression, a work of art, a gesture - to communicate effectively it must stand out against a background of common understanding, a meaning horizon. Yet to be truly creative, it cannot simply pass along inherited meanings. It cannot be an issue of simple difference or idiosyncrasy, cannot be a permutation already prefigured, but a revolutionary meaning horizon. It must institute new meanings which are rooted in, but not prefigured by the original potential structures that are concretized in the present setting. It must establish its own context; yet in order to signify anything at all, it must avail itself of inherited communal expressions, sedimented meanings.

Everyday communication, for the most part, avails itself of communally understood words or word structures with sedimented meanings for heuristic, practical reasons. "Such communication thus exhibits what Heidegger called *Gerede*: idle talk, which merely passes along available meanings, trading them in ritualistic fashion within a commonly understood context" (Jones, 1989, p. 2). Patently, such talk is necessary if we want to buy a souvlaki or elicit directions to the closest subway station.



Authentic, creative speech in such a situation would be woefully out of place and might even be potentially incendiary, depending upon our audience. For example, there may often be an intentional foreclosure of the creative impulse to expression in certain contexts, lest one's linguistic facility be held to be "...fancy, intellectual, unmanly. Communication in an army barracks, for example, often involves the deliberate suppression of diversity in word, dress and action, while semantically empty, all-purpose adjectives such as 'bloody' are used to convey emphasis..." (Goody, 1987, p. 285). Such idle talk ritualistically achieves guaranteed acceptance because it operates within a mutually agreed context of understanding. Yet, such "constituted speech" already assumes that the decisive step of authentic nomination has already occurred. It has, however, become separated from its significant, originating context and has become vitiated and shallow due to that schism.

Edwin Jones (1989, p. 3) raises two questions associated with the paradox of creativity: 1) how does authentic nomination become idle?; and 2) how does a new significance arise from stale, sedimented concepts? Of course the fact that they have retained significance indicates that sedimented meanings have had an originating, authentic character in the first place, suggesting a shared, communal sense of significance. Yet, by the same token, creative expression exhibits a personally felt sense of significance which is metaphoric before it can be conveyed to a community of subjects. Communal understanding and a personally felt sense of significance are, therefore, both operative in the creative act of expression.

For the purposes of conceptual thought and linguistic convention, it is necessary to posit certain meaningful structures which are considered invalid within the rules set out by objective-scientific criteria. These may simply be characterized as meaningfully present in our lives, but of a nonconceptual and nonlinguistic nature. Such structures stemming from phenomenological description are not merely subjective or impressionistic. They are simply imbued with sense and are not deduced or inferred, but disclosed in the primordial situation.

This is why, as we saw above, Heidegger makes the ontological/ontical distinction. The latter is an ontology based on substance and is evinced by the ordinary scientific procedure of giving priority to the existence of individual, particle-like atoms which are added together to form a whole.

The ontological whole, however, is significant, structurally integral, before its deduction by the summation of the parts. Metaphysically, though, how can one prove the existence of discrete entities which then give rise to clear and distinct ideas when one lacks, from the outset, an originary expression of the required horizon of significance, some ontological - not merely ontical - ballast? Jones' central task is clear: "(It is to see)... how the presupposition of an objective physical universe, held to be univocally given as valid for all, is an idea that must itself have emerged through an expressive act that gave a new significance to an available concept and that set the norms for the modern understanding of 'Nature'" (Jones, 1989, p.6).

Though one can attempt an historical analysis - someone must have thought the idea in the first place and then articulated it - it is perhaps more fruitful to pursue the phenomenological exploration of the contact between prepersonal, prelinguistic perception and its "higher" order articulation. Given such a motivation, one can only ask how the unity of an ontical structure can be derived from primary experience of the world when it can only be thought. How do specific entities initially have presence and existence before their synthetic totalization? Seemingly, through a creative act that complies with Nietzsche's dictum: before the concept, a metaphor (Jones, 1989, p. 11). The puzzle has to be created before the parts make sense. The world has to be perceived metaphorically as a clock before one even starts looking around for the individual bits of evidence which will allow one to conclude that the world is a clock. It is "like" a clock first. The truly creative, expressive work hits us so hard because we see the truth in it so clearly right away. We are made to deconstruct the experience after the fact, however, in order to come to terms with its deviation from the cultural, historical norms which we abstractly understand as its source. In the case of perception, we identify with the source of the aesthetic experience because we already possess the mute perceptual experiences which inchoately inhabit the shared sedimented meaning horizon.

As we have seen, a great deal of confusion concerning sedimented meaning and creative, authentic expression can be blamed on the practice of scientific conceptualization. In failing to recognize that it already has a strategy in place for subsuming phenomena under concepts which was originally creative and metaphoric, science assumes second-order, objective accounts of the world to be basic, whereas, in fact, such conceptualizations, in order to be valid and persuasive, must have already been structured at

the preobjective level of perception. What objective, scientific conceptualizations overlook, according to Jones, is that:

...clearly defined thought cannot precede an originary, creative expression, that is, an intuition of significance that can be realized only in execution...authentic expression, whereby a meaning horizon exhibiting its own norm is initially established, will always be presupposed by any secondary expression. Without a clear account of such first-order, genuinely creative acts of expression in their capacity to make new meanings and new meaning horizons communally accessible, any effort to ground historical-social enterprises such as philosophy of natural science, including the sciences of language and indeed all epistemological inquiry, will forever be confronted by the antinomies that inevitably result from taking secondary expressions, the *gedacht*, as the basic phenomenon to be treated in the analysis of human understanding. Merleau-Ponty suggested as much in his admonition that if we want to understand clearly the privileged position accorded to Reason, 'we must begin by putting thought back among the phenomena of [authentic] expression' " (1989, pp. 113-14).

### La Langue and La Parole

In his book, *Speaking and Meaning: The Phenomenology of Language*, James Edie provides a rigorous analysis of how language-using consciousness is rooted in the foundational structures of perceptual, prelinguistic consciousness. His central thesis is that:

...while language as a structure, as an ideal entity, is ontologically dependent on historical acts of usage, of speech-acts, which in each actual occurrence mean something new and different from anything which has ever previously been uttered, these same speech-acts logically presuppose the already ideally and objectively established formal laws according to which acts of linguistic meaning can take place (1976, p. x).

As such, his interest lies with how personal, contextually derived meanings partake of a common intersubjectively constituted life-world of meanings, how all individual acts of speaking (*la parole*) are rooted in the structure of a language (*la langue*). In seeking an answer to how the ideal can become

immanent in real psychological acts of speech, he assumes, unlike Merleau-Ponty, that there are phonological, morphological, and syntactical structures that are presupposed by speech-acts and which logically allow them to take place. His view, consequently, reverses Merleau-Ponty's ontology and epistemology which, as we have seen, insists that all second-order objective expressions are presupposed by prior acts of signification which occur preobjectively and prelinguistically in perceptual experience. For Merleau-Ponty, the theoretical, analytic institution of linguistic laws can occur only after a creative, authentic articulation has taken place; all sedimentations of meaning are parasitic on this decisive prior act having already occurred. Hence, *la parole* is logically prior to *la langue*, contrary to what Edie supposes.

Whereas Merleau-Ponty would claim that meaning arises from the miraculous animation of a thing through its nomination into Being, Edie argues that the speaking subject is already "hard-wired" to distinguish between meaningful and meaningless sentences due to the operation of linguistic laws which precede speech-acts. As he puts it:

Beneath the level of *words*, and beneath the level of *sentences*, spoken language is a coherent system of phonetic variations which render the existence of words and phrases themselves possible. Words and phrases are composed of phonemic 'signs', which in themselves do not mean anything independent of anything at all (in the sense that they do not designate or denote anything independent of this semeiological system itself) but are, rather, only the diacritical marks necessary to distinguish one word-sound from another according to certain patterns. The language, as a phonemic (semeiological) system, carries its meaning within it, as a global reference to the whole world of experience, capable of expressing an unlimited number of things, which only gradually take on a specific sense (Edie, 1976, p. 87).

Merleau-Ponty would reject such a transcendental interpretation out of hand. Though he would concede that the babbling of babies which eventually results in true speech at around the age of two imitates the primordial melody, intonation and musical contour of speech, and that they never reflexively learn the rules of linguistic propriety in the form of explicit judgments and grammatical rules, this does not mean that their language wielding skills are pre-determined. Speaking, therefore, does not

activate pre-given linguistic structures, but creatively articulates things in their figural significance, in their salient presence. According to one of Merleau-Ponty's favourite analogies, the acquisition of language proceeds in the same way that an adult learns the style of a hitherto unknown work of art or piece of music. Just as one feels one's way into the gestural, modal presencing of the work, one perceives the melodic arc of a sentence in its entirety. It is simply not the case that either individual tones or phonemes are serially and transcendently deciphered and then built up in consciousness according to abstract grammatical laws.

Though, as we have seen, speech and thought are inseparable, Merleau-Ponty would concede that *la parole* most definitely occurs against the background of *la langue*. Yet, *la langue* is not to be understood as operational in terms of an obeisance to acquired formal, grammatical rules, but simply as the cultural historical inheritance of sedimented meanings. *La langue*, for Merleau-Ponty, is the fundamental "silence" out of which all acts of *la parole* take place. The ground of all speech is this silence; yet, this is not to suggest that silence is a no-thing, is unstructured or is meaningless. It is, in fact:

...highly determinate. Moreover, and this is even more important in our actual acts of speaking, the speech acts of *la parole* (our particular usages of our common language in each particular case) result in a kind of "coherent deformation" of the already sedimented meanings and which is constituted of all the forms, all the linguistic institutions of the historical tradition of our distinctive linguistic culture. We speak, in short, on the background of a complex, determinate, and already articulated matrix of linguistic structures which at each instance enable our speech-acts to take place, and thus enable us to break silence and to say something new in authentic and original acts of meaning. Thus *la parole* brings about a constant dislocation and continuing change in *la langue*. We may use the same words we have used on previous occasions, or the words the great thinkers and philosophers, the classical writers of our literary tradition have used, but the meaning of these words is never fully grasped and transmitted once and for all; the very *meaning* of our words is itself a limit-concept which eludes speech by always escaping beyond it into the transcendental silence of the realm of conceptual thought, which, while polarizing our attempts at expression, always escapes us to

some extent, and thus always leaves room for more to be said, for our langue to be used by countless other speakers and writers for *their* purposes and for *their* intentions, which will, in turn, introduce us into *new* realms of linguistic meaning, which are nevertheless comprehensible and communicable to all on the basis of a common understanding and acceptance of the structures of *this* language, an acceptance of common rules which is *sufficient* for all purposes of communication but which is never fully *adequate* to bring expression to completion (Edie, 1976, pp. 102-103).

Merleau-Ponty's attitude, then, is not that of a structuralist, but of one seeking to reconcile the phenomenology of the speech-act with the apparent linguistic rules which are realized in speaking. Such rules are not, however, to be assumed to be transcendently conferred, but as simply emerging equally from the interstices between words as from the spoken words themselves, from the silence that surrounds speech.

At this juncture, it would seem that Edie appears to accept Merleau-Ponty's position that the immanent or existential meaning of words is not rendered by their correspondence with transcendental concepts, but solely in that meaning "inhabits" every speech-act and that each and every specific speech-act, viewed as a Gestalt, is meaningful in the relational totality of meanings that is the ultimate linguistic Gestalt: language. Nevertheless, this is not the case as, in the following passage, he exposes his deep faith in Husserlian neo-Cartesianism. He claims that:

... precisely because the primary phonological systems according to which we speak necessarily reach their culmination in *words*, it is impossible to limit the discussion of what language *means* to the immanent and intralinguistic structures of phonology. With the emergence of words, meaning becomes dependent on syntactic (and semantic) rules and structures which are not accounted for by phonology and morphology. With the word, language becomes a semeiological system, which is to say that it is endowed with the function of standing for, indicating, or referring to something other than itself. What the higher systems of syntax and semantics bring into play is another "miraculous" human ability, the ability to take something for something else, to analogize (the elemental and all-pervasive function of higher intelligence which the associationists

spoke of in terms of "association" and which Husserl called simply "pairing") (1976, p. 131).

My difficulty with this argument is not so much that it is wrong *per se*, but that the shift from immanent meaning to transcendental meaning is both superfluous and needlessly complicating. To say, as Merleau-Ponty does, that words carry their meaning prelinguistically and preobjectively would appear to be sufficient. Since the transcendental conception which occurs at the cognitive level makes reference to the prelinguistic situation anyway, why should it assume a pre-eminent status as *the* gauge of meaningful speech-acts? Surely, the meaning of speech-acts is not predicated on adopting the role of linguistic analyst/vivisectionist in order to reductionistically and positivistically establish the one-to-one correspondence of every signifier with its significant? Since every consecutive conceptual overlay simply abstracts further away from the original context of meaning generation, and creative expression, and that Merleau-Ponty's position is never refuted, one wonders why Edie is so convinced of the truth of his position. Given that each ascendance to a new meta-linguistic plateau is parasitic on the original situational Gestalt (which according to the *Logos* of Being makes reference to the ultimate Gestalt of significations which is wide-open and inexhaustible), it simply seems unnecessary to casually quibble about the meaning of the specific speech-act that has a whole melodic arc of meaning before its autopsy. Moreover, to accept that speech-acts take place within a context, within a field or atmosphere which is permeated by meaning, may even render the attempt at meta-linguistic interpretation counter-productive. Take the example of humour. To understand a joke, we do not need to assume a transcendental position because its gestural atmosphere is grasped in the context of the conversation prior to, and in defiance of, any posterior synthetic analysis and appraisal. Upon hearing a joke, we do not respond with "I'll get back to you about that one with regard to its validity and potentially humorous yield". The body is already possessed by "uncontrollable" spasms of glee prior to any thought of the possibility of the meaning-bearing capacity of the words heard. In fact, the amusing anecdote that has to be explained loses all of its initial potency; upon seeing that it has fallen flat, the teller will usually just reply with something along the lines of "It doesn't matter" or "I guess you had to be there" in preference to engaging in some meta-linguistic explanation.

What is particularly strange about Edie's arguments against Merleau-Ponty's position is that, following upon the defence of his transcendentalist conception of meaning, he implicitly accepts Merleau-Ponty's contention that meaning emerges from the conversational context wherein the speaker solicits the engaging presence of his interlocutor. He claims that:

...the sentence is thus normally the only full unit of thought and, as such, as we shall see, enjoys a certain independence from the words which compose it. But, at the same time, our sentences are highly transitory, passing, rapid happenings or events. They are what happen to words. We scarcely ever fix our sentences permanently in our minds or remember them. If we wish to remember them, we must deliberately "memorize" them. We learn vocabularies of words but not vocabularies of sentences (except for the most standard and stock phrases of a language). Words, on the contrary, represent sedimentations of more incomplete but more readily available meanings; they outlive the sentence, which quickly dies... (and) they get defined in dictionaries and can be stored in our cultural space in a way sentences (with exceptions perhaps for some of the greatest) are not (1976, p. 133).

This passage serves only to reinforce Merleau-Ponty's position and, thus, to deal the fatal blow to the transcendentalist position. It is clear that it is not necessary for the words in a sentence to be transcendently deciphered and then reconstructed through a synthetic act for meaning to emerge. The meaning is already there immanently in the context; and moreover, in that the specific words being used can rarely, if ever, be repeated verbatim, this serves only to underscore that meaning unfolds in a manner appropriate to the immediate conversational context, and not in accordance with abstract linguistic rules. The selection of specific words is, therefore, subordinate to the meaningful exchange in the conversational setting. This is why we retain meanings and do not necessarily remember the specific words employed. And this is just as true of the speaker as the audience. As Merleau-Ponty often remarks, it is sometimes the case that, in referring back to a conversation, it is impossible to recollect whether the words issued from myself or my interlocutor. The meaning and value of the exchange is all that matters in the long run.



## Sedimented Meaning and Improvisatory Play

A great deal of what is held to be meaningful and valuable in a conversation is that it is not fully determinate, but that its playful, improvisatory nature heightens and broadens its experience through the sense of anticipation associated with its openendedness. If we only sought irrefutable data, clear and distinct ideas in conversation, then we would be quite happy in exchanging platitudes, cliches and jargon, in the literal world of sedimented meanings. There would be no interest in the unquantifiable, and there would no impetus to engage in creative expression. We would always possess the ready-made utilitarian structures necessary to imparting information and would never be at risk of our intended meanings being misinterpreted or derailed in their passage to another's ears. One would hope that even the most reductionistic among us could not view this ideal of language and its institution as anything other than completely dystopian.

Two things appear to be certain: we do require a familiarity with sedimented meanings in order to communicate with others who share our cultural-historical inheritance; yet, nonetheless, central to our enjoyment of conversation, is that it improvises on such received meanings in a thoroughly engaged, unrehearsed, dynamic dialectic occurring between ourselves and our interlocutors. The dual functioning of previously instituted meanings acquired in the past and the openendedness of meaning on the horizontal future which is manifested in the improvisational present is perhaps best understood by analogy to the phenomenological experience of music. Let us assume for a moment that a musical note may be taken as analogous to a word. The performance of both must be practiced and sedimented before there is the possibility of engaging in either music or conversation. (A trumpeter, for example, must rehearse and perfect the *embouche* required for the production of a single tone to no less a degree than a baby acquiring language skills). The sedimentation of the approach to the individual tone and word is, therefore, clearly essential as a prerequisite to communication. Nonetheless, neither the tone nor the word has meaning solely in and of itself in isolation, but only by reference to other sedimented structures in a relational totality of meaning. Hence, just as a word in conversation makes sense not only in its phenomenological contextual being, but also in that it has a function in a whole semeiological system of sedimented meanings, the tone in an improvised phrase of music is situationally meaningful yet still functions,

as well, within a system of sedimented harmonic structures. For the meaning of a conversation or a piece of music to blossom, then, previously acquired structures must be appealed to in order to provide a frame of reference for what is improvisationally unfolding; the creative figure must be perceived in relation to its meaning horizon as, if it is not, there is no way of recognizing the significance of the improvised phrase *or to even perceive that it is an improvisation* unless the experience is grasped as a whole Gestalt of meaning.

Why music can serve as such an appropriate model for the elucidation of the relation of sedimented meanings and their creative, improvisational reinterpretation in a present is that it fully resists its transcendental understanding, interpretation and evaluation. Though the following will receive fuller treatment in Chapter Four, I think that it would be prudent to reach some conclusions concerning the analogy of the perception of meaning in conversation and music. Recalling the section above entitled "The *Logos* of Being", it would seem to be easily maintained that music is "pregnant with sense", that it has immanent meaning in that it does not make reference to extra-musical concepts, and that its value is established in its immediate contextual perception and appreciation. There would also seem to be no doubt that it is invitational, engaging and that it solicits attention in the full realization of its meaning; and that, consequently, self-transcendence towards it is not something that has to be demanded or made imperative abstractly. Furthermore, its significance occurs in Gestalts wherein the present figure, especially in improvised music, such as jazz, stands out against a background of sedimented harmonic structures. And just as reference is made to past, previously acquired meanings, there is a simultaneous projection onto the future horizon which, due to the *Logos* of Being, is openended. Through the *ek-stase* of music, improvisations are known to be only present configurations and that the potential for future delineations is inexhaustible. Ultimately, then, all present creative expressions in music point simultaneously to the past and future and occur as fluid moments of a continual dynamic, dialectical process which forms a relational totality, an ultimate Gestalt of musical meaning.

By this characterization, it should be clear that musical meaning is not transcendently deciphered as a series of discrete now-points occurring in a linear series which is then reconstructed by a constituting consciousness. Rather, it is an invitational field of presence, an immediate palpable

opening to the *Logos* of Being, and the phenomenological experience of primordial contact. But, though a case can be made for the analogy of conversation and music in that both are immediate, contextually significant, and not abstractly, transcendently made meaningful, music would seem to differ from conversation on at least a couple of fronts. Though both are, at root, perceived in a whole gestural, melodic arc of meaning, music so completely resists its reification, the possibility of its making reference to determinate concepts, that it is, for all intents and purposes, impossible to acquire anything beyond the most general sense of a piece, especially a sustained, complex instrumental work, upon hearing the work for the first time. At least, in a conversation, one walks away from it with the gist of what was said, even if the particular expressions employed have not been retained in memory. Oddly, though, and this is really and truly where conversation and music appear to part company, one can often, after hearing a piece for the first time, have complete recall of a melody that can be whistled note-for-note (or if one lacks perfect pitch, at least with the correct intervallic relationships) and almost certainly reproduced according to the same rhythm, speed and intonation of the original. That the meaning of the music, or at least its melodic configuration, can be so clearly perceived perceptually would seem to suggest that Merleau-Ponty is absolutely correct in assuming that meaning and expression are completely inextricable in their immediate, contextual experience.

What is so intriguing about the comparison of conversation and music, moreover, is what is retained. As was seen, the gist of a conversation is all that usually can be recalled, whereas with music the exact melody can be whistled or hummed, more or less precisely, even in the most non-musical of situations. What could account for this? Is it that conversation is more directly reliant on previously sedimented structures and music more on the possibility of future improvisations? Could this distinction be explained by the apparent necessity in music of introducing the basic melody more than once, in accordance with the traditional AABA structure of classical sonatas? And, if so, is this due to the fact that musical meanings are not so determinate, are not so amenable to their sedimentation, and, thus, that their appreciation is more contingent on an anticipation of a future, rather than a retrieval of the past?

To put this into perspective, let us consider the difference that exists between listening to a live performance and listening to a CD. Consider one

of the two main structures employed in jazz, the twelve bar "blues". As a sedimented structure, it is very determinate and very simple; furthermore its range of meaningful chord structures is limited a group of sixty chords basic to Western diatonic harmony. The possibility for improvisation and melodic innovation is, however, completely wide-open: everything from the straightforward articulation of Muddy Waters to the writhing filigree of Charlie Parker and John Coltrane. Though Muddy Water's intention would be quite clear in concert, I defy anyone to make the same claim about the other two. Though the introductory passages of Coltrane's "Trane-in' In" are digestible enough, where he goes with them is so complex that it would be virtually impossible to understand their significance were it not for the fact that they take place in immediate juxtaposition to the opening statement; one would, perhaps, not even be in a position to identify the song at all without reference to the "head", and it would seem that Coltrane was creating a new song *ex nihilo*, which, in some sense, he is. Following the performance, all that one could seemingly say about the gist of his interpretation would be something along the lines of: "Could you believe the way he turned that phrase inside out and improvised on a locrian scale rather than the anticipated mixolydian. Unbelievable!" Such an appreciative ejaculation would hardly seem to be a very informative encapsulation.

The constraints imposed on the perception of musical meaning by the *ekstase* of music in live performance are, however, not as rigid in listening to a CD of the same performance. One can listen more attentively to the solos any number of times in order to come to a fuller understanding and appreciation of the work by "sedimenting" the soloist's improvisational expressions. Such a procedure is hardly necessary in the context of a conversation, though. The difference would seem to be attributable to the fact that we have more direct access to countless sedimented meanings in language, while we have only sixty such sedimentations, in the form of chords, with which to build up an understanding of the musical meaning of a work. Being far more determinate, the creative expressions arising from conversation are not nearly as radically "free-form" as they are in jazz. Thus, it would seem, superficially, that conversation makes fuller use of past sedimentations of meaning, while music makes more use of the anticipation of future improvisations in the overall context of the meaningful situation.

Though it is somewhat odious to make such comparisons, it would seem that musical meaning, as compared with conversational meaning, more strongly resists its objectivation by a transcendental consciousness in that, in the attempt to capture music's meaning, all linguistic articulations of such meaning are far from satisfying.

### The Aesthetic Epiphany

Earlier in this chapter, I outlined the possibility that every creative expression is occasioned by the encounter with another that is made possible through an act of self-transcendence which is at once fundamentally *aesthetic* and *moral*. It is this contention to which I now return in this concluding section. The ultimate ground for this seemingly incredible claim can be found in Heidegger's view on the nature of aesthetic experience which lies at the heart of his ontology. In common with Merleau-Ponty, the ultimate aim of Heidegger's philosophy is to describe the fundamental communion and communication existing between a subject embedded in the world and his engaging object, that is, the intentional structure of the *Logos* of Being, of the primordial situation which is revealed by means of the phenomenological reduction. Yet, while Merleau-Ponty is more concerned with the meaning inherent in the primordial situation, Heidegger's fascination is with Being. For this reason, the ultimate ground of his philosophy is an *existential*, the "being-in-the-world". Accordingly, "to be-in-the-world" involves a conception of the "worldhood" of the world which must be acknowledged. The issue of *comportment* towards the world, of allowing the "worlding of the world", is central to "dwelling in" and "inhabiting" the world. With the mere suggestion of *comportment*, then, we recognize that "being-in-the-world" is not strictly an ontological issue, but a *moral* one as well.

It must be said immediately, though, that such "dwelling" or "inhabiting" is not to be understood in any quantitative sense such as being geometrically located in a space. To be is to be qualitatively situated, to "be there" where there is something to be done in a whole field of possibilities, in the openness in which we encounter another "being there" (*Dasein*) which may be resistant to our actualization of any particular potentiality. Thus, as I transcend my egological boundaries in my self-transcendence towards the world, I perceive qualitative tensions which *attune* me to the existence of the other. I become aware of the carnal resonance, the animate

presence to which I am inextricably, intentionally bound. Moreover, as I take heed of, "gather in", the other, I do not encounter a neutral thing, but embrace a *felt significance*. I recognize myself suddenly as a dialectical pole already engaged in conversation with another in one whole, dynamic intertwining. Yet, at this prelinguistic level, such conversation is *Rede*, or ontological discourse, which has not yet been made determinate as *Gerede*, what Merleau-Ponty refers to as "second-order", explicit and objective expression.

Heidegger characterizes this tripartite moment of affectivity (attuned comportment), understanding (felt significance) and expression (*Rede*) as one unitary, thrown structure: *disclosedness*. And it is through this conception of disclosedness that he understands and explains the nature of creative, artistic expression. As Edwin Jones puts it:

On Heidegger's phenomenological-ontological interpretation on human disclosedness, applied to the realm of aesthetic appreciation, a doctrine of communication emerges whereby creative expression is seen to be fundamental to the establishment of a mutual understanding on which all communication depends. The ultimate "meaning horizon," as I have been using the term, is furnished by a human being's prior understanding of its relationship to a world. This is the phenomenon Heidegger referred to as the worldhood of the world. It is such an understanding that comes to expression in works of art (1989, p. 128).

In short, what the perceiving subject encounters in the aesthetic experience of an art work is nothing less than his existential positioning, his "being-in-the-world" intersubjectively, meaningfully, and conversationally with others prior to any second-order understanding or explanation of the possibility of such interrelation. What the work of art ultimately reveals to a perceiving subject, then, is not just his "being-in-the-world", not just "being-there", *Dasein*, but "being-there-with-others", *Mitsein*. As such, then, Heidegger's ontological-aesthetic conception of creative expression approximates, to quite a degree, Merleau-Ponty's discussion of how the "in-itself-for-us" requires the creative input of the self-transcendent subject in order to fully articulate itself. In both cases, the intersubjective field of communication, participation and belonging, the primordial ontological situation, is revealed through authentic, creative acts of expression.

Given his revolutionary ontology, a philosophy of "radical astonishment" as George Steiner calls it (1978, p. 31), Heidegger felt that it was crucial to break free from ordinary linguistic expressions in order to come to an understanding of our being that we are always familiar with, the being which is always presupposed in our significant dealings with our world. Hence, just as the creative painter must always attempt to transcend rigid historical-cultural genres in order to be authentically expressive, Heidegger recognized the need to transcend familiar, yet worn-out sedimentations of meaning by using them in novel ways in order to capture that which conventional language, by its very nature, cannot achieve. Put rather prosaically, Heidegger's most revolutionary contribution to the philosophy of language, and thus, to ontology and epistemology as well, was to turn objective nouns into eventful, process-based articulations more in keeping with the *ek-stase* of Being. Hence, "being" in the ontical sense, for example, is recast as "being-in-the-world". Through this deceptively simple turn of phrase, Heidegger was able to bring together and elucidate all of the themes central to his ontology, especially the comportment of the "life-body" in specifically eliciting significant phenomena and revealing "the worlding of the world" in general. (The resemblance to Merleau-Ponty's conception of the attunement of the engaged, responsive body-subject in the articulation of the invitational, disclosing other in the primordial situation should be abundantly evident.)

No one knows the inter-relation of attuned comportment, the perception and understanding of significance in the other, and the authentic, creative expression of that relation better than the poet. In *Poetry, Language, Thought*, one of Heidegger's central claims is that creativity is predicated on a "willingness to stop, listen, hear, remember, and respond to the call from Being" (1971, p. xv). What this means is that, in keeping with his exhortation to "let beings be", the perceiving subject must let the other presence itself according to its own style, and if this is to be expressed in language, that such language must be appropriate to the nature of the thing as it is situationally encountered. All speech that is appropriate in this sense is, for Heidegger, poetic; hence even pure prose is as poetic as any poetry. As he states it: "The voice of thought must be poetic because poetry is the saying of truth, the saying of the unconcealedness of beings (1971, p. 74), and it bids all that is - world and things, earth and sky, divinities and mortals - to come,

gathering into the simple onefold of their intimate belonging together" (1971, p. 206).

One of the most compelling arguments for accepting that the *Logos* of the world revealed in the primordial situation is not solely ontological and epistemological, but moral and aesthetic as well, is provided in George Steiner's superb work, *Real Presences* (1989). Following Heidegger, he takes pains to explain that ethics and aesthetics are not to be understood in any traditional sense as normative systems which rank values according to some abstract conception of right/wrong, good/bad; in other words, that is, certain actions are more or less obligatory or certain objects more or less beautiful, respectively, but the authentic attitude towards the world, towards the "real presence", is also one of trust and answerability. As I have put it, self-transcendence, the act of opening to the world, embraces this very position: in the existential profferment of an invitation to communion, there is a *trust* on the part of the embodied self that the engaging other is there and that, accordingly, through the very act of transcendence, the self becomes *answerable* to that presence.

That his theory meshes quite nicely with my own conception of primordial contact as an aesthetically grounded communicative communion between invitational and responsive selves and beings-in-the-world may be given credence by his central contention that:

...any coherent understanding of what language is and how language performs... any coherent account of the capacity of human speech to communicate meaning and feeling is, in the final analysis, underwritten by the assumption of God's [Nature's, Being's] presence. I will put forward the argument that the experience of aesthetic meaning in particular, that of literature, of the arts, of musical form, infers the necessary possibility of this "real presence" (1989, p.3).

As he views it, the traditional obsession that philosophy has had with the dubitability of the existence of others, or of Nature, is a non-issue. The existence of others, including works of art, is, therefore, undeniable, yet involves, in a very real sense, a leap of faith:

...[a] wager on the meaning of meaning, on the potential of insight and response when one human voice addresses another, when we



come face to face with the text and work of art or music, which is to say when we encounter the other in its condition of freedom, is a wager on transcendence (1989, p.4).

Clearly, Steiner agrees with Heidegger's and Merleau-Ponty's characterization of the communion with others made possible through the reduction to the prepersonal realm of primordial contact. Yet his view is perhaps even more revolutionary for he claims that, not only is it possible to argue that an aesthetic approach to the world is ontologically basic, but that Being, the 'real presence', exists palpably in the aesthetic experience of art and music. As he puts it in the context of music in particular (1989, p.6):

I believe the matter of music to be central to that of the meanings of man, of man's access to or abstention from metaphysical experience. Our capacities to compose and respond to musical form and sense directly implicate the mystery of the human condition. To ask 'what is music?' may well be one way of asking 'what is man?'.

The mysterious intensity of the response to certain original, not merely "novel", "interesting" or, most pejoratively, "quaint", works of art suggests that an audience experiences a somatic reaction which does approximate the encounter with responsive interlocutors. One need only think of the public outrage provoked by the works of Picasso, Genet, and Nabokov upon their initial releases. There were riots in the streets of Paris when Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* was first performed as a ballet in 1913. Though tame by today's standards, *Lady Chatterly's Lover* was considered unconscionable smut, and Mozart was pilloried for using descending chromatic octaves which was deemed chaotic and in gross violation of musical propriety.

What might account for these reactions? As I have been arguing throughout, in the *epiphanous* moment in which an invitation is proffered and accepted - in which engaging other and embodied self achieve communion and initiate conversation - an improvisatory, aesthetically creative exchange is set into motion. Our first authentic encounter with *Hamlet* should be disturbing and epiphanous because we are, through a process of identification with Hamlet, staring in the face of the stark truth about ourselves and our relation to the world: the primordial situation. This encounter with the sublime at the moment of disclosedness is, paradoxically, both terrifying and reassuring in that we are made aware of an

onerous answer-ability to the other, but comforted by its carnal, embracing resonance. We are not alone, but we must act, must respond; as a hand is extended, so too, is a gauntlet. This moment of peak emotional experience is the ultimate *trial* of encounter, a trial in the sense both of a test and of an ordeal.

The epiphany is the primal opening wherein we recognize that, yes, there is a dagger before us, that there is something and not nothing. We have unintentionally been cast into the world of *Dasein* and *Mitsein*, of felt significance. Intense empathetic identification crystallizes the urgent need for appropriate comportment; we must listen, be at-tuned to the other; we must engage, and the conversation begins that reveals the *ek-stase* of time as we attempt and achieve response-ability. There is a lightning flash, an *ecart*; the presence emerges and a world begins to form around us. Gestalts arise and perspective is born as we gently move into an open-ended, dynamic, dialectical exchange. David Michael Levin (1988, p. 386) uses the metaphor of a thunderbolt to capture the epiphany, the moment of disclosure:

The thunderbolt, symbol of the *Logos*, of *Phusis* and the flashing glance of Being, ...[may be] thought as the symbolic, tropological presence of the ontological difference. The decisiveness of the thunderbolt, the character of the descission it makes, and makes visible, in the night sky, is a 'repetition' by nature which gathers our dreambodyvision into a recollection of the ontological difference - that descission, that rending of the tissue, the flesh of the field, which takes place wherever there is an event of vision. The bolt bursts into presence, rends, tears, tears open, divides, differentiates, amplifies difference. Thus, the ontological difference is made visible in the field of our vision as that primordial descission, or opening in the matrix of Being, through which a figure-ground structuration comes into Being. The figure-ground, centre-periphery, focus-diffusion differentiation is the most primordial difference, the most primordial inscription and layout that the ontological difference makes in the field of our vision. In the 'instant' in which this most primordial process of differentiation takes place, an *ek-static Gestaltung* comes into being...

What the "epiphanous moment", or as Heidegger calls it, "disclosedness", reveals is that, with the splitting off, the *ecart*, of the other as it becomes a

"real presence" to the self-transcendent subject, there occurs a tripartite moment of felt significance, attuned comportment and ontological discourse (creative expression) which suddenly takes on a temporal, *ek-static* dimension. At no time is the other ever an object. It cannot be felt or responsibly engaged except as a dialectical interlocutor, an equal participant in the process of improvisationally determining, sedimenting the meaning of ephemeral, situational Gestalts.

The requirement for authentic articulation, and thus for improvisatory conduct, in each and every situation before it resolves to the horizon, suggests that the moment of felt significance, attuned comportment and creative expression occurring at the epiphanous moment has an aesthetic dimension. Having already discussed this characterization of the primordial situation primarily in ontological terms, I would like to return to Steiner's theory of art in order to indicate just how thoroughly aesthetic the entire process of disclosedness is.

Steiner inveighs against the simplistic, journalistic, often sensationalistic, tendencies of art criticism. He condemns art critics who produce self-involved, self-conscious commentaries upon commentaries while blithely and systematically ignoring the potent source of a masterpiece's meaning and intent: the truth and answerability attending sublime, primordial contact. Less forgivable, perhaps, is that most of us are inclined to read superficial, second-order interpretations instead of directly experiencing great works themselves; and in so doing, we distance ourselves from artistic revelation. As he states it:

We flinch from the immediate pressures of mystery in poetic, in aesthetic acts of creation as we do from the realization of our diminished humanity, of all that is literally bestial in the murderousness and gadgetry of this age. The secondary is our narcotic. Like sleepwalkers, we are guarded by the numbing drone of the journalistic, of the theoretical, from the often harsh, imperious radiance of sheer presence. Beauty can, indeed, be 'terribly born', as Yeats says. The cry of those Angels in Rilke's *Duino Elegies* can embarrass intolerably. The news brought by annunciations not only stays new; it can be unendurable in its ambiguity. So we slide past the singing rocks, their songs stifled, or made artifice, by secular gloss and critique. I sense that we shall not come home to the facts of our

unhousedness... if we do not redefine, if we do not re-experience, the life of meaning in the text, in music, in art. We must come to recognize, and the stress is on *re*-cognition, a meaningfulness which is that of a freedom of giving and of reception beyond the constraints of immanence (1989, pp. 49-50).

As I interpret Steiner, the failure of art critics, especially literary critics, is that they belittle or, at least, neglect to countenance the centrality of immediate, personal contact with art in favour of establishing aesthetic norms/genres. As a consequence, the aesthetic experience tends to be marginalized by theoreticians whose tacit, yet often centrally motivating, assumption is that a work is to be categorized rather than perceived in its imperious "unity, harmony, and radiance", to use the words of St. Thomas Aquinas. Indeed, the more intent a critic is on mounting a consistent theory, the less attentive he will be to the artist's revelatory gift; with the end result that the felt significance of the work is de-fused, de-activated.

What, then, is essential to art and subjective aesthetic experience, which critical commentary and interpretation only succeed in distorting and negating, according to Steiner? First, echoing Heidegger's and Merleau-Ponty's ontology, is the amazing "fact" that another, be it an existent or a work of art, exists at all and is luminously responsive. The epiphany reveals not only a self destined to the world, but beings-in-the-world, the "worlding of the world"; this is what great art achieves. Secondly, Steiner reasons that just as the encounter with Being instills amazement, wonder and awe at the fact that *myriad beings exist at all when they could just as easily not exist* and that they present themselves according to their individual modes of expression - which in itself calls for specific forms of ontological discourse and poetic articulation appropriate to each and every situational encounter - so, too, do great works of art. As he puts it:

The experiencing of created form is a meeting between freedoms. The famous question at the roots of metaphysics is: "why should there not be nothing?". This very same question underlies any grasp of poetics and of art. The poem, the sonata, the painting, could very well *not* be. Except in the trivial, contingent perspective of the commission, of material need, of psychic coercion, the aesthetic phenomenon, the shaping act, is at all times and in all places at liberty not to come into being (1989, p.152).

To artificially force-fit a truly original artwork into an abstract category in order to maintain a consistent theoretical position is both deceitful and, in some sense, unjust. As wonder is predicated on the fact that an existent could *just as well not exist as exist* (the ontological difference), the same attitude should apply to great works of art. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, for example, was not created to conform with pre-established poetic conventions or genres. What so immediately overwhelms us, what makes it sublime, is not just its originality, but that, by its very originality and individuality, it thwarts its easy codification within a pre-conceived, theoretical, historical continuum. Its production cannot have been predicted, its realization anticipated. And because it came from nowhere, out of the blue, so to speak, for this reason it should be easy to conclude that *it could just as well not exist as exist*. Therein lies a great deal of its tremendous affective power. In reading the *Four Quartets*, what we recognize is the speaking of truth as it was revealed to Eliot when it was revealed by a muse, by Being, at the instant of the *ecart*, the epiphany.

What poetry (and all other art forms) does, usually without intention, is transcend boundaries and traditions, not reinforce them. It is rare to find an artist such as Tristan Tzara, who once said "It is time to smash centuries of Baroque subtlety". Great works should be received according to their own merit and not interpreted within artificial psycho-historical parameters. It is fascinating to speculate on how, to take the example of "jazz" (I put this in parentheses as "jazz" should be understood as an artificial, all-encompassing term for an extremely diverse group of musical styles), ragtime evolved into dixieland, then into swing, then into bebop, and then resolved into "cool" versus "hot" jazz; yet one should never be so presumptuous as to identify a seminal, definitive moment at which one resolved into the other. Furthermore, they all still exist simultaneously in the here and now. There is here, then, an apposite analogy with ecology: variations occur through time without intentional direction; by themselves, seamlessly, "mutations" take place that could just as easily not have taken place as they did. Herein lies the marvel, the ontological difference. As Edwin Jones puts it explicitly with reference to art: "Creative expression institutes a new significance and establishes a new meaning horizon whose own structure provides the norm for its interpretation" (1989, p.140).

Thirdly, Steiner argues that the reception and ingestion of a work's meaning, the artist's communicative intention, by an audience involves

*trust*. As he captures it in the following passage, there is a covenant of response and answer-ability between artist and audience that is at once perceptual, cognitive, affective and spiritual:

Face to face with the presence of offered meaning which we call a text (or a painting or a symphony), we seek to hear its language. As we would that of the elect stranger coming towards us. There is in this endeavour, as deconstruction would immediately point out, an ultimately unprovable hope and presupposition of sense, a presumption that intelligibility is conceivable and, indeed, realizable. Such a presupposition is always susceptible of refutation. The presence before us may be that of a mute (Beckett edges us towards that grim jest), of a madman uttering gibberish or, more disturbingly, of an intensely communicative persona whose idiom - linguistic, stylistic, hermetically-grounded - we simply cannot grasp. There are literary, artistic, musical works which remain closed or only superficially accessible to even the most welcoming of perceptions. In short, the movement towards reception and apprehension does embody an initial, fundamental act of trust. It entails the risk of disappointment or worse. As we shall note, the guest may turn despotic or venomous. But without the gamble on welcome, no door can be opened when freedom knocks (1989, p. 156).

What makes this ethical moment even more complex and intense is that the meeting is ambiguous because it is so radically openended. For the achievement of communion and communication, one must make a creative, aesthetic leap of faith in the absence of strict moral guidelines for appropriate behaviour. Following Heidegger, Levin captures this moment of seeming existential crisis in the following manner:

When we understand, as he [Heidegger] says, 'the present and the future are not the object of a science but [the product] of construction or action', then we see that we have no viable alternative but to take responsibility for our corner, our situation, despite its ambiguity, despite its paradox; and that we must make our decisions, make our commitments, take our stands, despite the risks and the anxieties - equally moral and epistemological - which they cause in us. Of course, we should pay attention to these anxieties, for they can keep us honest, vigilant, tolerant of difference, open-minded (1988, p.33).

A theoretical aesthetician who attempts to mount consistent, scientific, absolute aesthetic categories might find Steiner's and Levin's hermeneutically-grounded theories of art wholly unsatisfactory, if not absurd or chimerical. It would simply be difficult for him to countenance that aesthetic experience includes felt significance, attuned comportment and creative communication at the level of prepersonal, precognitive ontological engagement in concrete perceptual situations. He would steadfastly refuse to accept that the meaning of a work is never wholly revealed, but is given in ephiphanous moments of disclosure when a glimpse of the real presence in an *ek-static* Gestalt rends the darkness of meaninglessness like a lightning bolt. With the reduction to the perceptual level of primordial contact, we are made aware that situations are always openended, and that any creative articulation of that experience should be tempered by the recognition of the inexhaustibility of the encounter; hence the need for trust in the real presence or the meaning of the work of art existing right there, before us. The very evanescence of the dynamic moment of revelation is what calls for appropriate improvisatory aesthetic and moral conduct:

We advance step by step towards a delineation of the given space; our perceptions are more and more justly incident to the circumference of possible intent and meaning. The congruence is never complete. It is never uniform with its object. If it was, the act of reception would be wholly equivalent to that of original enunciation. Our guest would have nothing to bring us. But exactly as in differential calculus, the open-endedness of the philological method does not annul its rigour or revelatory potential. On the contrary. It is the very fact that circumscription and determination are only partial, that they remain mobile, self-correcting, which confirms both the autonomy of the meaningful presence in the poetic and the integrity of our reception. I have said before: a good reading falls short of the text or art object by a distance, by a perimeter of inadequacy which are [*sic*] themselves luminous as is the corona around the darkened sun. The falling-short is a guarantor of the experienced 'otherness' - the freedom to be or not to be, to enter into or abstain from a commerce of spirit with us - in the poem, the painting, the piece of music (Steiner, 1989, p. 175).

Positivistic scientific accounts of aesthetic experience are deficient for a number of reasons. *First*, is that the perceiving subject invests his very being in his interpretation of an art work, commits himself to responsibly acknowledging the real presence in the full awareness that his trust in the other's being there is contingent, at risk of rejection. He does not assume the stance of a disinterested, academic vivisector neutrally affixing predicates to an alien object; instead, he engages a vibrant, carnal interlocutor. His leap of faith through his act of self-transcendence is not an instance of decorum, but of profound moral commitment.

*Secondly*, as Steiner (1989, p. 36) puts it:

The sciences... proceed by research. In science, work of the very first order can be collective and cumulative. Scientific papers do bring new recognitions and methods in a demonstrable or refutable sense. In the laboratory, in the mathematical seminar, central techniques of perception and manipulation can be taught. Not one of these three configurations is genuinely applicable to aesthetic study and pronouncement, except at the most formal, linguistic-textual level. The positing of an opinion about a painter, poet or composer is not a falsifiable proceeding.

This, however, is not to suggest that aesthetic experience is wholly relative, and subjective and, therefore, that there can be no agreement concerning the substance of interpretations and value-judgments. With respect to the argument that the epiphany may plausibly have an essential, universal character which may be revealed under artificial testing conditions in the laboratory, Levin has this to say:

Arthur Deikman, a prominent experimentalist, has recently reported some noteworthy psychological experiments with 'subjects' who are doing traditional Buddhist meditation. It was discovered that, when these 'subjects' were queried about their visual experience with a blue vase they were asked to focus on, they noted, in particular, the following significant shifts:

- (1) increased vividness, brightness, and richness in the colour;
- (2) a sense of its 'aliveness' (not felt to be incompatible with the fact that the thing would certainly not be classified among living beings);



- (3) increased sense of realness and a *visible* deepening of the thing's significance;
- (4) a felt decrease in the distance, or difference, between it and them;
- (5) a more explicitly affective organization of their perceptual response.

And Deikman singles out three factors which he believes to contribute to this perceptual shift: first, a heightened, more appreciative attention to the sensuous, aesthetic element of the perceptual situation; second, the cessation of logically controlled, analytic, and abstract processes of thought; and third, an attitude he characterizes as 'receptivity to stimuli' (openness instead of defensiveness or suspiciousness). There are, of course, other factors as well. But it is surely significant that these factors, at least, have received confirmation in controlled experimental conditions (1988, p.400).

*Thirdly*, to assume that aesthetic interpretation can be cumulative and absolute is, in effect, to assume that commentary upon commentary, the tertiary reading of secondary interpretations is valid; yet, as we have seen, such an approach can only further distance us from the source of meaning and intention that lies at the heart of the aesthetic experience of a masterpiece: contact with the real presence.

### **The Real Presence and Transpersonal Ecology**

Hermeneutically retrieving Chapter One, I think that it is possible to argue that transpersonal ecology and the aesthetically-grounded nature of the primordial situation have much in common. What grounds Naess' statement of Ecosophy T, and, by extension, Fox's Transpersonal Ecology, is that ontological belonging is predicated on attempting the phenomenological reduction, on asking progressively deeper questions about the relation of selves and beings-in-the-world, conceived as processes, so that fundamental assumptions concerning that relation are revealed. What this chapter has attempted to elucidate is that - and this is where Fox and I part company - whereas he characterizes the aesthetic valuation of Nature as an instance of extrinsic, utilitarian valuation (1990, pp. 154-160), I regard the appreciation of Nature as fundamentally aesthetic. Moreover, insofar as moments of epiphanous disclosure are aesthetic in that creative

expression, along with felt significance and attuned comportment, is ontologically basic to the revelation of the *Logos* of primordial contact, communion and communication, it is imperative to view aesthetic wonder as the handmaiden of appropriate ecocentric behaviour, worldly comportment. Aesthetic engagement, then, is a matter of prepersonal, perceptual contact and not of its second-order codification as an instance of either intrinsic or instrumental valuation.

I believe that there are a number of reasons for seeing an analogy between transpersonal ecology and an aesthetic phenomenology of the *Logos* of primordial communion and conversation. *First*, the whole chapter has reasoned that selves and beings-in-the-world are never polarized as subject and object as rationalism and empiricism would have it. To the degree that a self accepts an existential invitation to commune and converse with another existent, a trust in and answerability to the other is creatively improvised and concretized. At no time, then, do "subject" and "object" encounter each other in any pre-ordained fashion as discrete entities in a neutral, value-free realm. By contrast, the whole process of self-transcendence is clearly a movement away from any narrow, atomistic, or particle-like conception of self.

*Secondly*, the nature of the epiphany, the *ecart*, that sets the process of *ek-stase* into motion as a dynamic, dialectical exchange between selves and beings-in-the-world would seem to be central to the process of Self-realization! as I interpret the term. Both the phenomenological reduction to the prepersonal, perceptual primordial situation and Self-identification! very clearly contain a leap of faith in beings' being there, in the possibility of identification with others, which effectively renders inconsequential the necessity of *ontologically* proving the existence of other beings and of *ethically* establishing prescriptive norms of behaviour. Both activities are superfluous since the other is undeniably there as a trusting conversational partner, a joint participant in the improvisation and sedimentation of the meaning of the contextual encounter.

*Thirdly*, both Self-realization! and attuned comportment, ecocentric care and concern, take place in jointly participatory situations of inter-relation that are acknowledged to be fully openended and inexhaustible. Through the *ek-stase* of temporal Gestalts, the self continually transcends egoic,

biographic boundaries in an ever-expanding helix of wonder and astonishment at the amazing fact that one is in the world with other selves.

In conclusion, both philosophical approaches characterize our being-in-the-world as a condition of radical freedom to engage and communicate with other beings with an ecocentrically appropriate attitude of care and concern, "steadfast friendliness". What this chapter has attempted to articulate is that, by the grace of the flesh, we enjoy an incarnate relationship with the resonant being and meaning of others at all times in concrete contexts. Situationally, we are always presented with existential invitations to commune and converse. Though encounters with the sublime, the real presence, are seemingly rare, moments of disclosedness, revelation, are always at hand as long as our "steadfast friendliness" is maintained and we accept the proffered invitation, thereby reaping the experiential reward, the existential gift. As long as we maintain a trust in, and answer-ability to, other beings, and nurture the openended capacity for care and concern, the worldly comportment that is made possible through Self-realization!, we may be assured of communion with our conversational partner.

### 3 ENVIRONMENTAL AESTHETICS

#### Do We Need an Aesthetics to Appreciate Nature?

In the quest for a seemingly elusive metaphysical alternative to dualism, many environmental philosophers, especially Ronald Hepburn, Allen Carlson and Yrjö Sepänmaa, have recently turned to the philosophies of art and beauty to see if aesthetic contact with nature might generate appropriate environmental concern. A central feature of most of the current exploration of nature aesthetics is a reconsideration of the much neglected field of natural or environmental aesthetics and how its investigation might yield moral results. The central difficulty which is identified by most current authors is that the starting point must be a critical examination of the *distinction* between artistic beauty and natural beauty. This forms the basis for the examination of certain fundamental questions such as: Is natural beauty identical to artistic beauty, even similar? Should natural beauty be examined within its own paradigm or by reference to art, if the first question resolves into the negative? Should natural science and ecology provide the foundations for a novel nature aesthetics? Where do we draw the line between art, nature, environment, beauty and aesthetics? Is it possible, or desirable, to seek objective, rigorous arguments which may supply the groundwork for the realization of a consistent, rational, exhaustive environmental aesthetics? In reference to the last, Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell respond by issuing a caveat (1995, p. 3):

(The) characteristics of the conception of landscape, natural beauty, and nature, and the difficulties they suggest in the way of making clear conceptual distinctions, undermine any attempt to produce an hierarchy of concepts that will constitute a definitive foundationalist grasp of their complex interaction. Nature is not *the* most fundamental concept of natural beauty or landscape, and the attempt to resolve issues about the experience of natural beauty by deriving its vocabulary from such concepts is likely to fail. Better then to deal with natural beauty by showing the cluster of concepts that make up the parameters of our present understanding, without worrying about the metaphysical certainties that a determinate foundationalist schema promises.

Two authors in particular, T.J. Diffey and Ronald Hepburn, eschew metaphysics in order to reach a looser, more everyday understanding of natural beauty than that which is required by a rigorously logical theory of environmental aesthetics. The basis of Diffey's paper, "Natural Beauty without Metaphysics" is that, in a general inquiry into natural beauty, we should not unduly stress the importance of the traditional philosophy of beauty as its fundamental questions such as "whether beauty is a real quality, or whether judgments of beauty are subjective or objective" (1995, p. 43) may needlessly limit its scope. With reference to the second component of the question, Diffey argues that there is such a contemporary obsession with relativism/subjectivism that all attempts to argue for some public criteria for understanding and characterizing natural beauty are effectively debarred from consideration. What he finds particularly deflating about the subjectivist/relativist position is that, in its blithe dismissal of more objective responses to the question of "What is beauty?", it assumes an arrogant philosophical superiority. He maintains that (1995, p. 44):

The doctrine that beauty lies in the eye of the beholder appears invincible because in aesthetics above all there seems to be the least space for error; or to put it the other way around, in matters of taste what seems to be the case must be the case, for that is what taste is. If everyone believes that what is beautiful is what pleases him or her, what possible grounds could there be for denying that if it pleases then it is beautiful?

Yet, on the other hand, he criticizes traditional philosophical responses to the question of "What is beauty?" for being unnecessarily constrained by only three possible lines of interpretation: "beauty as the object of biological or sexual interest; beauty as disinterested appreciation of a rational mind; and an idealist rating of art above beauty in importance" (1995, p.47). Clearly, these are of very little use in the discussion of the appreciation of natural beauty: the first, patently, has no pertinence; the third has already rejected the possibility of any profound or informed comparisons between artistic beauty and natural beauty; and the second is just too biased in favour of objective contemplation at the expense of subjective appreciation to be wholly convincing.

So how can we make a case for natural beauty? Though Diffey, admittedly, does not want to offer any explicit, definitive answers, his.....

conclusion is, nonetheless, weak. He reasons that, since nature is such an amorphous concept, the only way to speak of natural beauty is by identifying certain features of nature, such as landscapes, views or prospects which have *already been recognized aesthetically* and, thereby, he shifts the discussion away from natural beauty to natural aesthetics. Yet he leaves the discussion of natural aesthetics at that and his final word is unfortunately not very enlightening: "To ask if a *prospect* is beautiful, or of any aesthetic interest, is as odd as asking whether murder or lying are wrong" (1995, p. 52).

In inverse proportion to the shallowness of penetration into the question of natural beauty contained in Diffey's essay is the profundity of Ronald Hepburn's ruminations. In particular, the central theme of Hepburn's thought bemoans the shift away from the aesthetic appreciation of nature and the conflation of the aesthetic and the artistic in the twentieth-century. He suggests that the neglect of natural beauty in aesthetic investigation is so strong that "aesthetics is even defined by some mid-century writers as 'the philosophy of art', 'the philosophy of criticism', the analysis of the language and concepts used in describing and appraising art objects" (1984, p. 9). But, although he is critical of this narrowing in the field of aesthetics, he offers some reasons for why it has occurred, why aesthetic concern with natural objects is "rather a rare phenomenon" (1984, p.9).

Primarily, he attacks the reductionistic/mechanistic view of nature promulgated by objective reason that has polarized humans and non-humans. On a societal level, he reasons, dualism has the effect of belittling the role of natural beauty as a moral educator and of alienating humans from a putatively unintelligible, absurd world. And on a cultural level, dualism creates a general dissatisfaction with, and even repugnance towards, natural objects, with the result that the traditional imitation and representation of natural objects stemming originally from Aristotle is no longer considered valuable; since the world is conceptually dead, essentially mute, contemporary artists must embrace some form of expressionism, must create their own objects to express their inner life.

Identifying objective reason as the source of the neglect of natural beauty is not Hepburn's central task. Rather, he argues that this neglect has very negative consequences; for in accepting so limited a scope, aesthetics ignores an "important and richly complex set of relevant data" (1984, p. 11) and precludes a whole range of possible experiences of the world. He concludes,

therefore, that a systematic identification, description and evaluation of natural objects must accompany any discussion of art objects if aesthetics is to generate any consistent, generalized norms of aesthetic appreciation.

In his book, *The Beauty of Environment* (1986), Yrjö Sepänmaa rigorously attempts Hepburn's project. His intention is to convince the reader of the moral importance of protecting non-human environments by appealing to their aesthetic sensibilities. He makes it clear that the aesthetic appreciation of nature must operate within an aesthetic paradigm that is different in kind from art aesthetics; consequently, his arguments grow more out of the philosophy of beauty than the philosophy of art. To understand his conclusion, however, one must first examine the detailed distinctions that he draws between art objects and natural objects.

The primary difference that Sepänmaa outlines is that the art object is intentionally created by an artist as an artifact. The production of the work, however, is not just its physical formation - "animals and machines are also capable of that" (1986, p. 56) - but the result of decisions made. A work of art, then, is purposefully conceived to afford aesthetic pleasure and its every feature may be viewed as having potential aesthetic interest. A natural object, however, merely exists; it has not been created to serve any human aesthetic end. Furthermore, art objects are created and received within a tradition of artistic conventions, while natural objects have no such status. Consequently, art objects, unlike natural objects, can be judged to be either successful or unsuccessful, good or bad, to the degree that they realize the creator's intentions. It would seem, then, that art and nature require to be examined within two distinct aesthetic paradigms. In the case of the former, the artist's intention, the artifact and the audience's reception of the work are all relevant in an estimation of the work's aesthetic value; yet, in the case of the latter, only the natural object and the perceiver's ability to discern or disclose aesthetic qualities in the object have any aesthetic significance. In the absence of an artist, however, it is debatable whether the natural object can be judged aesthetically, and, hence, interpreted within an artistic aesthetic paradigm.

### **Carlson and Positive Aesthetics**

Allen Carlson (1984), too, believes that although nature has aesthetic value, it is not artistic value, and should be evaluated within its own

aesthetic paradigm. His justification for this is a distinction he makes between positive aesthetics and negative or critical aesthetics. He maintains that, since an art object is intentionally created, and therefore every feature may be interpreted and evaluated, it is permissible to judge such an object as aesthetically good or bad. And since negative aesthetic judgments are possible, it is clear that art should be evaluated within the negative or critical aesthetic paradigm. Natural objects, however, are not intentionally created and, therefore, cannot be deemed to be aesthetically bad. Indeed, as Carlson argues, all virgin nature, unaffected by humans, is essentially beautiful and thus can have only positive aesthetic value. Consequently, in Carlson's view, to attempt to apply negative aesthetic judgments to natural objects is a futile task. Nature must be evaluated within its own unique, non-artistic, positive aesthetic paradigm.

Though initially Carlson's justification for his claim that all virgin nature is beautiful echoes Hepburn's positive estimation of nature as the norm of aesthetic inquiry, his position on positive aesthetics is far more philosophically rigorous. His first defence of positive aesthetics is a response to the charges that 1) even if the positive aesthetics position is true insofar as all virgin nature is beautiful, the appreciation of the natural world may not be aesthetic; and 2) if only positive aesthetic judgments are permissible (negative judgments being impossible) there is really no aesthetic judgment being made, and, hence, no aesthetic appreciation of nature. Carlson counters these criticisms on two fronts. First, he argues (1984, p. 13) that even if one grants that, given the impossibility of having negative aesthetic judgments, it is not permissible to speak of one's positive judgement as aesthetic, it does not follow that one's appreciation of nature is not aesthetic. Second, he reasons (1984, pp. 13-14) that although negative aesthetic judgments are impossible and only positive aesthetic judgments are permissible, it is wrong to assume, in the absence of a choice, that there is no aesthetic judgment. For if it is granted that all virgin nature is beautiful, and that it is aesthetically good, it is not so much the case that negative judgments are impossible, but that they could never be justifiably attached to what is always beautiful. To claim, for example, that the Victoria Falls are inconsequential - a negative judgment - would certainly have no purchase by anyone's standards. Hence, in principle, negative aesthetic judgments are possible, but their application to actual virgin nature would not be. Again, then, it would seem that the contention that the appreciation of nature is aesthetic is not defeated.



Having shown that our appreciation of nature is indeed aesthetic, but perhaps neither positive or negative, Carlson presents another justification of a positive aesthetics. His starting-point is the notion of the sublime in nature, stemming from Burke and Kant, according to which nature cannot have an author and has no design, and its threatening, uncontrollable otherness forces a positive appreciation that manifests itself as "amazement, wonder or awe" (1984, p. 14). Insofar as nature, then, is both "alien" in that it is beyond our control, and "obscure" in that it is beyond complete human understanding, negative aesthetic criticism of it would appear to be "pointless and presumptive". For, as Carlson indicates (1984, pp. 15-16), to whom would one appeal to alter the natural setting in order to augment its aesthetic yield? Moreover, in our considerable ignorance of the forces of nature, what grounds could we have for assuming that nature could be aesthetically better and, hence, that negative aesthetic judgments would be justifiable? Clearly, if the concept of the sublime is accepted, one is forced to conclude that, in the absence of an artist, it makes no sense to attempt a negative aesthetic evaluation of nature; nature must be seen positively, as well as aesthetically.

As forcefully as Carlson argues for the acceptance of nature's being aesthetically appreciated solely in a positive manner, there are, however, still arguments that he does not address. First, it is possible to ask what he means by "virgin" nature. Surely any environment, merely in being identified as "environment" and thus assumed under a concept is under human control and is not, therefore, untouched or virgin. Though this may seem a trivial point, it may not be if one considers Carlson's ultimate aim: the establishment of appropriate moral concern for nature and the protection of wilderness by means of an appeal to the possibility of its positive aesthetic appreciation. For Carlson's aim to be realized his argument must effectively demonstrate that virgin nature can only be positively evaluated, and this entails proof of a human inability to control nature. He attempts this through the notion of the sublime, which is appropriate in that the notion of the sublime hinges on nature being foreign, its threatening otherness filling the perceiver with awe and wonder. Yet, as Yi-Fu Tuan (1974, p. 112) sees it, the very bracketing of "virgin nature", or as he calls it, "wilderness", is to devoid it of "awe" and "threat" because the very conceptualization of wilderness as an object (even of a sublime nature) distances it and puts it under our control. And as long as it is under our control, by Carlson's own characterization, nature can be

judged to be aesthetically good or bad, can be examined within the critical/negative aesthetic paradigm. Hence Carlson's insistence on a separate positive aesthetic paradigm for nature would appear to be questionable.

Furthermore, would the possibility of evaluating nature within the critical/negative artistic aesthetic paradigm hinder the realization of Carlson's intention? Does it really matter aesthetically whether or not nature is virgin or disturbed, or even merely conceptualized, by humans? Since Carlson establishes the aesthetic value of nature by appeal to it always being beautiful and, conversely, being ugly to the degree that it is disturbed by humans, it certainly does matter. What if, in the case of a burnt forest, it is not known whether the cause of the fire was anthropogenic or natural in origin? According to Carlson, a burnt forest, if part of a natural process, such as ecological succession, has positive aesthetic qualities due to that fact, but would lack them if the burning had occurred due to human activity. If one were not aware of the fact that the fire was due to human agency, one might perhaps appreciate the burning in the same way one would appreciate a dissonant chord in music, as something which provides contrast and anticipates resolution - something which might even increase one's positive appreciation. But knowing that the fire was anthropogenic in origin should not really impair the anticipation of rebirth and rejuvenation. Only knowledge that the woodland was being cleared for a development would preclude aesthetic valuation, surely? Furthermore, what if the fire was not intentional, but the result of carelessness - would this make positive evaluation impossible? And finally, does not the ranking of human-disturbed areas and wilderness implicitly suggest that negative aesthetic criticism, though banished from considerations of virgin nature, is still pertinent to the broader field of environmental aesthetics? An argument for a separate aesthetic paradigm would, consequently, seem to be a very difficult task; and its desirability and necessity may even be called into question.

### **Art Objects and Natural Objects**

Carlson's call for two separate aesthetic paradigms may, however, be justified if one returns to Sepanmaa's other distinctions between art objects and natural objects. Though the two agree that any object whatsoever can be viewed aesthetically, with "appropriate aesthetic appreciation... that

appreciation of an object which reveals what aesthetic qualities and value it has" (Carlson, 1984, p.25), they acknowledge that there is a strong contrast between the perception of art objects and natural objects.

What is peculiar to the perception of art stems from the art object itself. An art object differs fundamentally from a natural object in that it is a limited, static, unified, self-contained, fully determined totality which is set apart from its surroundings and has a formal completeness in itself. In being framed, it determines a very specific attitude on the part of the perceiver. The presence of the frame distances the spectator and determines his/her response. The frame, in isolating the work from its environment and making it clear that what is not enclosed by the frame is not part of the aesthetic experience, delineates a limited, definite context for interpretation. It informs the perceiver that every element within it signifies something other than itself and that each has a role in the overall interpretation and understanding of the work. The art object, as Hepburn states it, contains "built-in guides to interpretation and contextual controls for our response" (1984, p. 16). In short, the frame communicates to the observer that the work is intelligible as a perceptual whole.

In order to understand an art object and appreciate its aesthetic qualities, then, the perceiver has to know how the work is to be seen, must know what it is, what its historical significance is and how it is to be classified. He/she must have some knowledge of art history and criticism. For example, one's aesthetic appreciation of a Van Gogh is contingent on knowing that it is a post-impressionist painting, and not a German expressionist work (Carlson, 1984, p. 25). Since artistic categories precede aesthetic judgments, one must be aware of stylistic conventions, and interpret and evaluate the work within its specific genre before it can be deemed to be aesthetically good or bad. Simply put, one must be aware that each facet of the work contains references to external sources and that each referent must be identified before the work can be understood and appreciated.

In perceiving a natural object, however, the observer is faced with a very different set of circumstances since nature is basically "frameless". A natural object differs from an art object primarily in that it is not separable from its environmental setting. It represents only a momentary Gestalt, a temporary focus against its background, the natural environment. It is not a fully

determinate, static totality, but an ephemeral grouping of immediately-given phenomena. As such, it places very different demands on the perceiver than does the art work. For one, the very fact of being in nature erodes the distance between perceiver and the natural "object" or, perhaps more accurately, between perceiver and an event that possesses aesthetic value. There are no references to interpret since there are no environmental categories (as there are in art history and criticism) to which the perceiver can appeal in order to shape his/her interpretation. Thus, aesthetic understanding and evaluation of a natural object is entirely dependent on one's capacity to group the present scene, to create an object. One's aesthetic appreciation of a natural object is contingent on one's ability to delineate and articulate the natural object. The natural object is different from an art object, then, in that what lies beyond the present focal point on the horizon can always be incorporated into the "object"; one's experience is, as a result, always open to modification. Moreover, since the interpretation of the significant qualities perceived in the temporary object are always corrigible, there is an elusiveness to the aesthetic qualities in the natural object which "creates a restlessness, an alertness, a search for ever new standpoints, and for more comprehensive Gestalts" (Hepburn, 1984, p.25). Ultimately, then, the distinction between the perception of the art object and the perception of the natural object is that, in the case of the latter, one's ability to understand and evaluate the object and to have an appropriate aesthetic experience relies on one's active grouping of phenomena, the supplying of a context, a phenomenological delineation of the natural object in the presencing field. In turn, however, this momentary significant combination of phenomena "presupposes a readiness in the observer... and an ability to classify" (Sepanmaa, 1986, p.43). In the case of an art object, the observer is far more passive and distanced: since the art object is intentional, everything that has bearing on reception and intelligibility is contained within its circumscribed boundaries. One has only to disinterestedly affix the external referent to the reference in the work in order to divine the work's meaning and experience its aesthetic value.

That an art object comes complete with a frame and that a natural object is frameless - the frame being supplied by the perceiver - would seem to draw an absolute distinction between the two, and thus justify their inspection within radically different aesthetic paradigms. But, are natural objects never framed by convention? The case of the landmark, the scenic outlook, for example, would appear to blur the distinction between natural

objects and art objects. Sepanmaa recognizes that landmarks or "outstanding objects" are the products of social activity, of cultural definition, and can be defined as "communal, memorable and socially recognized places in the landscape" (1984, p.45). He states that there is an analogy between the landmark and the art object in that:

It is pre-determined from where we should go to the sight or viewpoint, from where one should look and when. External regulators of this kind are paths, roads, as well as, especially for motor tourists, rest-places, signs, view-signs, quotation and name boards, guide pamphlets and books, postcards, maps. The view, the landscape, has a facade, the viewer a place, a viewing-point or route, which is a path of structures, for example outlook towers (the numerous towers of Niagara, for example). At such places there are even binoculars with which the landscape can be viewed in greater detail, or devices that give a typed description.

The existence of such landmarks suggests that there are pre-established norms for experiencing nature aesthetically that approximate artistic conventions or genres. The landmark approaches the classic in art in so far as it offers a standard for aesthetically judging objects of a similar kind.

Yet, while Sepanmaa acknowledges this analogy between art objects and certain natural objects, he is highly critical of the use of landmarks as a means of interpreting and establishing the aesthetic value of other natural objects. For in assuming that only that which is culturally designated as having aesthetic value indeed has such value, one loses sight of the framelessness of nature - of the need for the perceiver to recognize the open-endedness of the perceptual situation and contextually delineate the natural object so as to experience appropriate aesthetic appreciation. The entire distinction between the art object and the natural object is that the status of the latter is always corrigible; it is the dynamic tension between the immediately-given phenomena and the framer that generates aesthetic value in the eventful natural setting. And since it is known to the perceiver that the delineation of the context is open-ended, that the designation of the "object" is transitory, the framed, fixed, fully-determined object represented by the landmark is of no aesthetic value. Since the aesthetic appreciation of natural objects is contingent on temporary framing, on constantly revising

one's viewpoint, the perceiver is aware of the need "to overcome stereotyped grouping and clichéd ways of seeing" (Hepburn, 1984, p. 47).

### **Subjectivist and Objectivist Theories of Aesthetic Appreciation**

Having dismissed landmarks in the field of environmental aesthetics as suitable analogues of classics in art history and criticism, and art aesthetics, Sepanmaa nevertheless finds himself on the horns of a dilemma which stems from an inability to account for the origins of appropriate aesthetic appreciation. Is it the product of the recognition of an object of consciousness as an aesthetic object or a distinctive type of perceptual experience? On the one hand, since his overall aim is to establish moral concern for nature through the establishing of the appropriate appreciation of nature, he does not want to commit himself to a subjectivist/relativist account of natural beauty; for in so doing, he would have to admit that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Such a position leads to aestheticism, the narcissistic, resourcist view that nature exists to give us aesthetic pleasure or, as the novelist John Fowles puts it, turns nature into "a free clinic for admirers of their own sensitivity" (1979, p.39). Sepanmaa must even reject the subjectivist/formalist account mounted by Clive Bell who suggested that what affords aesthetic appreciation is solely the perception of what he designated "significant form", the "lines and colours combined in a certain way, certain forms and relations of forms that stir our aesthetic emotions" (cited in Rader, 1979, p.288). Though Bell's theory is initially appealing in that it mirrors the notion of aesthetic experience in response to the sublime (a mute, non-cognitive aesthetic appreciation characterized as wonder or awe - which has the additional benefit of not necessarily requiring an expressive artist), it is far too personal to serve as the basis for the objective, normative system that he requires to ground ethical concern for nature and ensure its protection.

Thus, Sepanmaa must reject both a subjectivist aesthetic theory on the grounds that it is too relative, and jettison aesthetic appreciation construed as a kind of consciousness. Moreover, however, he must also dismiss an objectivist/intellectualist account of appropriate aesthetic appreciation. The reason for this is that this account assumes that aesthetic value exists in the object as an identifiable property, and that aesthetic appreciation arises from the rational inspection of the correspondence obtaining between observable aspects inherent in the work and their conceptual referents. But, if one must

adopt such a dispassionate, disinterested distance from the object - and one surely must if one is to transcendently decipher the connection between symbols expressed in the work and their conceptual yield in order to be afforded an aesthetic experience - one loses the cornerstone of Sepanmaa's argument for natural aesthetics: engaged contextual immediacy in the perception of nature.

Whereas distancing is appropriate for the interpretation and evaluation of an art object, even mandatory, it is not appropriate for the perception of natural objects. As Sepanmaa argued in the case of the landmark, there is not a body of environmental depictions to which one can appeal in order to demonstrate the aesthetic value of a natural object. Whereas the art critic can refer to the established genres identified in art history in order to aesthetically judge the value of an art object, this is not an option for the environmental critic. Even if there were enough landmarks to serve as standards for the comparison of the relative aesthetic value of natural objects, it would not, in Sepanmaa's view, be appropriate to adopt such an approach. For the landmark, in being so fixed conceptually, is far too determinate to allow for the free improvisatory play in a natural aesthetic field that is appropriate to the aesthetic appreciation of nature. In denying the open-endedness of the perceptual situation and limiting the creative framing or delineation of the natural object by the observer, the landmark ceases to afford aesthetic experience. In conceptually distancing the perceiver from nature, the intellectualist/formalist account implicitly belittles the importance of the contextual relation between observer and nature, the intensity of the lived experience of a world that is alive, dynamic and eventful. And in so doing, it prevents the perceiver from experiencing appropriate aesthetic appreciation. The objectivist theory is appropriate for art aesthetics in that art is fictitious, "amoral, external to the moral" (Sepanmaa, 1986, p.68). This is not the case for environmental aesthetics: the environment is real and, hence, aesthetic appreciation of nature has a truly moral dimension.

But, though Sepanmaa must reject both subjectivist and objectivist theories in his search for the appropriate aesthetic appreciation of nature, he still wishes to maintain a line of reasoning that would incorporate both a personal sensitivity to natural objects and an objective rational standard for establishing the beauty of the natural environment. In his attempt to delineate some middle ground, he suggests that individual perception

should be united with a knowledge of the operational mechanisms of nature. In fact, as he argues throughout, ecological value so utterly determines aesthetic value that it would be impossible to discover aesthetic value in any natural object that did not have ecological value as well. As he states it: "The claim that that which is against ecological laws cannot be beautiful appears to be analytically true" (1986, p. 135). His aim here is clear enough: he seeks a rational standard for appraising natural environments that would approximate the role of art history in appraising art objects. And it is obvious to him that an understanding of ecological laws can assist in the identification, depiction and evaluation of natural objects. That such knowledge can be aesthetically relevant is also suggested in a passage from Hepburn (1984, p. 135):

Suppose I am walking over a wide expanse of sand and mud. The quality of the scene is perhaps that of wild, glad emptiness. But suppose that this is a tidal basin, the tide being out. The realization is not aesthetically irrelevant. I see myself now as walking on what is for half the day sea-bed. The wild, glad emptiness may be tempered by a disturbing weirdness.

It seems reasonable to conclude that, in such a case, immediate aesthetic appreciation of the scene is affected by its environmental classification. The aesthetic significance of the event is directly proportional to the observer's familiarity with nature, if not natural history as well. Consequently, there seems to be a strong analogy between the roles of art history and ecology in establishing the aesthetic value of an object. How useful, and how valuable is this resemblance? If it could be demonstrated that a body of ecological laws, or perhaps more appropriately, natural history, could act as a standard catalogue of environmental depictions similar in kind to genres or conventions in art history, would it be sufficient for identifying and evaluating natural environments? Surely the fact that conventions in art are established by critics while ecological "truths" are hypothesised by ecologists indicates that art history and ecology represent two very different normative strategies? Unfortunately, Sepanmaa never spells out the analogy in much detail. Moreover, is it always the case, as Sepanmaa claims, that "ecology provides the norm to which concepts of beauty must conform" (1986, p.136)? Put otherwise, is it possible that ecological knowledge might be a necessary (if that), but insufficient condition for the aesthetic experience of nature? Do we even have to always be aware of an



environment's history and its ecological functioning before we can appreciate it aesthetically?

Since Sepanmaa claims that beauty and ecological value are "analytically" inseparable, meaning that the negation of the statement entails a contradiction, ecology would have to not only aid in the aesthetic judgment of the aesthetic object, but provide necessary conditions for the maximization of the aesthetic yield of the natural object. Unfortunately though, this assumption of logical necessity simply cannot be maintained. The claim is easily dismissed without even questioning the validity of assuming there to be ecological laws - something about which even ecologists are not in accord. As Neil Evernden reasons:

...it is by no means obvious that even if such laws were to exist, that they would inevitably coincide with aesthetic significance, or even with "beauty". There is no doubt that lakes killed by acid rain are more beautiful than energy-rich eutrophic lakes that are literally crawling with life; foresters have been able to demonstrate with ease that people find selectively logged forests not only more beautiful but more "natural" than untouched stands; and the pastoral or agrarian landscapes so beloved of tourists are infinitely - and deliberately - less diverse than were the natural ecosystems that preceded them (1988, p. 185).

It would seem, then, that the collapsing of the distinction between the ecological and the aesthetic may have dire consequences, particularly since Sepanmaa desires to argue on aesthetic grounds for the protection of virgin nature and not disturbed areas which may be more beautiful and promise a higher aesthetic yield.

Sepanmaa's inability to reconcile subjectivist and objectivist conceptions of beauty through ecology does not fail just because he cannot establish a necessary connection between beauty and ecological value, however. The attempted reconciliation is unsuccessful because he assigns too great an importance to ecological knowledge as a necessary condition for aesthetic experience. Why he chooses such a route is not surprising: he wants so badly to avoid aestheticism - the subjective use of natural objects solely as a means to aesthetic gratification - that he is not content to simply describe how a natural object might be seen as beautiful by a perceiver. Rather, he seeks to

demonstrate that a natural object *must* be seen as beautiful. And to this end, he must invoke an objective norm which will establish the undeniable beauty of the natural object: hence, ecology's significance.

In a paper entitled "Trivial and Serious in Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature", Ronald Hepburn provides just the line of reasoning that might rescue Sepanmaa from his morass. He maintains that, in the case of art, due to the existence of art criticism, we can relatively easily isolate the features of a work that are significant for serious appreciation while identifying and jettisoning what is merely trivial. But clearly, as we have seen through this chapter, the same does not obtain for nature appreciation. This is a very serious problem for Hepburn, for:

When we seek to defend areas of "outstanding natural beauty" against depredations, it matters greatly what account we can give of the appreciation of that beauty: how its value can be set alongside competing and vociferously promoted values involved in industry, commerce and urban expansion. If we wish to attach very high value to the appreciation of natural beauty, we must be able to show that more is involved in such appreciation than the pleasant, unfocused enjoyment of a picnic place, or a fleeting and distanced impression of countryside through a tourist-coach window, or obligatory visits to standard viewpoints or (should I say) snapshot-points (1995, p. 65).

Why Hepburn's thought is of the utmost importance is that he succinctly, appreciatively and virtually exhaustively, reviews that cluster of concepts that are appropriate to the discussion of natural aesthetics while putting into abeyance metaphysical questions of necessity and sufficiency. His discussion of aesthetic appreciation, most of all, rests with the examination of two key dichotomies: the "sensuous component"/"thought component" (which are, for all intents and purposes, representative of the subjectivist/objectivist duality) and the trivial/serious distinction which ultimately elucidates the issue of the aesthetic appreciation of nature. In response to the question of what we mean by the "aesthetic appreciation of nature", he introduces (and, as I suggested, "succinctly") the foundational concepts for approaching the issue in this manner:

By "nature" we must mean not just gentle pastoral landscape, but also tropical forest, tundra, ice floes, deserts, and objects (and events) made perceptible only by way of microscope or telescope. If nature's

materials are vast, so too is the freedom of the percipient. We have endless choice of *scale*, freedom to choose the boundary of *attention*, choice between the *moving* - whether natural objects or the spectator or both - and the *static*. Our choice of viewpoint can range from that of the underwater diver to the view of the upper surface of the clouds from an aircraft or an astronaut's view of the planet as a sphere (1995, p. 66).

The important concepts to be garnered from this passage are "events", "moving", "static", "scale" and "attention". All are of equal value, indeed central in Hepburn's thought. Yet, while such concepts might superficially be taken as suggestive of some sort of variety of subjectivism, this would be a simplistic interpretation. For what Hepburn is attempting to do is to draw his readers' attention to a contemplation of the dichotomies detailed above. One can accept received, cultural notions of appreciation - on either side of the subjectivist/objectivist bias - or really look at the ideas accruing to the lived experience of nature. To adopt either extreme is to also commit to a trivial or serious approach to nature appreciation. Hepburn is non-judgemental. His focus rests with the depth that one applies to the commitment to either position. Against trivial perceptual and reflective approaches, equally, he states that:

(They can) be attentive or inattentive, can be discriminating or undiscriminating, lively or lazy: that the doors of perception can need cleansing, the conventions and the simplifications of popular perception can need resisting. The reflective component, likewise, can be feebled or stereotyped, individual, original or exploratory. It can be immature or confused (1995, p. 68).

At root, the simple sensuous enjoyment of nature can be trivial if it does not take into account the otherness of the natural object, and its independent mode of existence that transcends any overly simplistic fixation with its aesthetic yield. Yet, by the same token, one does not want to think too hard about the object lest its engaging appeal vanishes under a blanket of theory: the problem associated with an over-emphasis on the thought-component. Just as it is perilous to simply view nature as pretty spectacle, it is equally wrong to so distance oneself from the experience of nature that one assumes that one is simply an independent, rational ego. Nature's otherness must not assume a superordinate position over our

deep embeddedness in its unfolding which allows for our sensitive delineation of the natural object in full appreciation of nature's equal, participatory working out of the setting. All that is truly required is a balance between the two components. As Hepburn states it:

Between the extremes, we might find an acceptable ideal for serious aesthetic perception in encouraging ourselves to enhance the thought-load *almost* to the point, but not *beyond* the point, at which it begins to overwhelm the vivacity of the particular perception (1995, p. 73).

The seriousness of this brief quote cannot be underestimated as it paves the way for the detailed discussion on the autonomy of nature, on the one hand, and our appropriation of its natural forms, on the other, which concludes the paper. Against the trivial, sentimental anthropomorphism of nature to which the sensuous component tends, he argues that a serious aesthetic concern with nature will militate against such a position. If we do not go to subjective extremes, we must admit that any serious involvement in natural forms and structures will possess, at the very least, an inchoate thought component. If we make the effort of taking our engagement in nature seriously, "the more earnest will be our regard for, and our respect for, the integrity and the proper modes of being of the objects in nature themselves, inanimate and animate" (1995, p. 70). We must not then simply jettison the tendency to anthropomorphize, but really come to terms with our annexation or appropriation of phenomena which does not occur in any calculating or manipulative way, but simply in "being imaginatively seized by them, and coming to cherish their expressive aptness, and to rely upon them in our efforts to understand ourselves" (1995, p. 71).

Yet, by contrast, we must recognize that wholesale annexation is both impossible and inappropriate, that nature's autonomy, its "otherness", must still be dealt with. We must acknowledge nature's autonomy. The traditional, certainly most pervasive arguments for seeing nature in and of itself, are through scientific theory. Yet this is problematic on two fronts, according to Hepburn (1995, pp. 71-72). First, being mechanistic and reductionistic, science must disinterestedly reduce the sensuous experience to its component elements; it "must fragment or overwhelm or dissolve the aesthetic perception, instead of enriching it. Aesthetic experience must be human experience - episodic, phenomenal. To destroy it can hardly be to

*deepen it*" (Hepburn, 1995, p. 71). Secondly, too great an awareness of nature's dysteleology, of the evanescence and fundamental insignificance of the individual ecologically speaking, may preclude the true appreciation of a butterfly or a gazelle before they are predated - something which may, in fact, sensuously, be very aesthetically relevant, though, granted, of a, perhaps, quite negative variety. Yet to falsify the being's natural role, to view it solely in terms of its aesthetic appeal is to deny it its otherness, its significance in a whole intersubjective field. Furthermore, to trivialize the experience by turning our back on nature's dark side, we "shirk the challenge to the would-be appreciator's own creativity" (1995, p.72).

Are we just tilting at windmills, then, to seek a serious, non-trivial case for the aesthetic appreciation of nature? Hepburn replies in the negative. His prescription is to first develop deeper understandings of nature which are not so quick to view non-human interaction through a moral filter. As he puts it (1995, p. 72): "If, for instance, we can celebrate nature's overall animation, vitality - *creative and destructive* in indissoluble unity - we may reach a reflective, or contemplative equilibrium, that is neither unqualified by melancholy nor disillusioned and repelled". Second, he recognizes that the annexation or appropriation attitude, too, may be approached in a more serious manner, through a discussion of metaphor:

We speak of depths and heights - in relation to moods or feelings or hopes and fears: of soarings and of glooms. We are lifted and dashed, chilled, spiritually frozen, and thawed. We drown, we surface; we suffer dark nights of the soul. Again, there is no simple one-to-one correlation between mental state and natural item. I may interiorise the desert - as bleak emptiness... or I may interiorise it as unscripted openness, potentiality...(1995, p.73)

Against solipsistic, trivial appreciations of nature, he argues that such annexed forms as metaphors are not limited to the self, but may be universally intersubjective. Furthermore, they need never be of a trivial nature, but are reliant on the individual to creatively animate them, even to the point of sheer, black terror in the soul. And, interestingly, such interiorizations are by no means a sheer human fabrication, but "seem half completed in nature itself... are apprehended with a mysterious sense that the components... deeply matter to us, though one cannot say how: the

shape of a hill, the precise placing of a stand of trees, or a solitary rock" (1995, p. 75).

Hepburn's conclusion is of a very phenomenological nature, at least as it has been pursued in this dissertation. Against his critics who maintain that annexation, interiorization will always make aesthetic appreciation relative and that it is pointless to pursue any serious aesthetic theory of natural appreciation, he counters by arguing that the depth of one's associations is entirely dependent on the imagination and seriousness of the perceiving subject in the face of nature's otherness combined with an awareness of the degree of appropriateness to the specific context. If one chooses to accept that there can only be one perspective on a natural object, that it has a certain dimension, tensile strength, colour, whatever, then one will not be interested in engaging in imaginative play with one's surroundings. Furthermore, since the issue of a definitive meaning for natural objects has been settled, one will not have the openness and the seriousness that is required for true aesthetic appreciation in any case. What, moreover, has to be borne in mind is that for the discussion of the trivial and serious, one must recognize how important the issue of perspective is. A cliff face seen from 30,000 feet above has nowhere near the significance of the majestic cliff seen at close hand. The same can also be said of the perception of art: if at too great a remove from art objects or music, they, too, will lose their immediate poignancy. Yet, to fully recognize the role of the individual in selecting viewpoints, establishing boundaries for the joint determination of meaning and significance by self and world - in short, the establishment of perspective - one may certainly make a case for the serious aesthetic appreciation of nature, in Hepburn's opinion.

### **Do we need a distinction between art aesthetics and nature aesthetics?**

In his paper, "Appreciating Art and Appreciating Nature", Allen Carlson adopts a more philosophically rigorous approach to Hepburn's distinction between the sensuous component and the thought component in the aesthetic appreciation of nature and more fervently insists upon the central role that a knowledge of natural history can play in the elucidation of the latter. Yet, unlike Hepburn, his interest does not reside so much in an analysis of the trivial/serious distinction, but with the very nature of appreciation in its historical development. In particular, he focuses on the notion of disinterestedness, basic to the "aesthetic attitude", which is

defined by Jerome Stolnitz as "disinterested and sympathetic attention to and contemplation of any object of awareness whatever, for its own sake alone" (1995, p.200). On the surface this would appear to have great potential for the appreciation of nature as it would seem to release natural objects from the requirement to resemble art objects in some manner in order to be appreciated. Since appreciation is wholly appropriated by a subjective attitude at the expense of the object, anything at all, even any natural object, can be viewed aesthetically and, more important, appreciatively.

Carlson is nonetheless concerned that this may, perhaps, go too far. Though there has been a backlash against disinterestedness for being too passive and contemplative with a concomitant rise in the area of appreciation, he argues that the wholesale rejection of disinterestedness may be wrong-headed for the simple reason that relevant knowledge about an object informs appreciation. In short, he would seem to agree with Hepburn that true appreciation requires a balance between the thought-component and the sensuous-component wherein neither overwhelms the other, particularly with reference to the latter swamping the former; hence, we explicitly understand Carlson's appeal for the need for an informed awareness about an object's status for true appreciation to occur. The difficulty is that disinterestedness is an essentially passive, contemplative position while appreciation is an active, engaged attitude that sets the stage for our imaginative and emotional interplay with natural objects. They, thus, move towards opposing poles: "disinterestedness pulls toward the general criterion of aesthetic relevance, sympathy in the other direction" (Carlson, 1995, p. 201).

The question is what is to guide our aesthetic attitude if we altogether reject norms of aesthetic relevance? Surely we require at least some guidance in order to ensure that our appreciation is appropriate to the object? If appreciation is responsive to an object "taken on its own terms", then surely there are some relevant directives, such as information external to the object in the form of "thoughts, images or bits of knowledge" (1995, p.202).

To get to the heart of the matter, Carlson turns his attention to art appreciation wherein information external to the specific art work is most assuredly relevant to the appropriate reception and appreciation of the

piece. In particular, he applauds Stolnitz's consideration of the shift in attention away from the aesthetic attitude (sensuous component) to a consideration of art appreciation (thought component) in this way:

Instead of the strict application of the general criterion of aesthetic relevance, we find concerning, for instance, the issue of relevant knowledge (that) we need not, however, condemn all 'knowledge about' as aesthetically irrelevant... 'knowledge about' is relevant under three conditions: when it does not weaken or destroy aesthetic attention to the object, when it pertains to the meaning and expressiveness of the object, and when it enhances the quality and significance of one's immediate aesthetic response to the object. Note that only the first condition accommodates the aesthetic; the latter two aim at enhancing the appreciation of the object. With the emphasis thus shifted to appreciation, sympathy outweighs disinterestedness, and we truly "follow the lead of the object." Moreover, it is not now the blind leading the blind, for the aestheticising cow-like stare gives way to appreciation not only responsive to the object but informed by knowledge of it. (1995, p. 203)

Carlson, even more than Hepburn, clearly emphasizes the need for relevant information about objects for true appreciation to flow. But there remains a key question: given that the foregoing quote is in relation to art appreciation, is he implying that there is a significant relation between art and nature appreciation and, if not, what are the salient differences as he sees it?

Carlson's framework for pursuing an answer to this is to divide both art and nature appreciation into design and order appreciation. First, with regards to the *design appreciation of art*, the central feature for appreciation is that the work has been intentionally created to afford aesthetic experience. The delimited, framed work is then disinterestedly evaluated as a totality in and of itself, utterly divorced from its relation to other things, even the artist, according to standards of aesthetic relevance, singularity, its place within an artistic tradition or genre and the like. The aesthetic requirements for design appreciation are threefold: the presence of an initial design (the intention, the problem or the situation being examined), the object embodying this design (seen in Aristotelian terms of radiance, balance and



harmony), and the individual who embodies the design (the skill behind the realization of the initial intention).

Secondly, with regards to the *order appreciation of art*, the position becomes less obvious and a little more complex. Though it contains the same central features of design, work and artist as design appreciation, the role of the first is of far less importance than it is in design appreciation. Instead of an initial intention that is realized in the work, the work simply unfolds due to "motor energies" (1995, p.209). Nonetheless, against the denials of artists like Jackson Pollock who claim that they are just one source of energy that produces the final pattern, the role of the artist cannot be completely overlooked for the simple reason that such variables as choice of colour of paints, their viscosity, and their placement on the canvas are not completely unselective; there is at least a "general notion " of what guise the resultant work will emerge in. What is especially important is that the artist is in no stronger a position than his/her audience to interpret the significance of the patterning of the ultimate artifact.

Thirdly, with regards to the *design appreciation of nature*, Carlson is dismissive of any attempts to assimilate the appreciation of nature into the appreciation of art by means of attempts to sketch an analogy between the resemblance of design in natural and art objects (1995, pp.213-214):

Frequently the appreciation of nature is assimilated to the appreciation of art. Such an assimilation is both a theoretical mistake and an appreciative pity. On the theoretical level, it typically involves misunderstanding not only of appreciation but also one or both of art and nature. On the appreciative level, it can result in either failing to appreciate nature at all or appreciating it in an inappropriate manner - relying on the wrong information, engaging in the wrong acts of aspection, and having the wrong response. As Ronald Hepburn points out in a classic discussion of appreciating nature: If our "aesthetic education" instills in us "the attitudes, the tactics of approach, the expectations proper to the appreciation of art works only", we "either pay very little aesthetic heed to natural objects or else heed them in the wrong way". We "look - and of course look in vain - for what can be found and enjoyed only in art".

Though a somewhat daunting passage, there are within it a few points of absolutely central importance to Carlson's overall argument. The first has been mentioned more than once in this chapter, yet cannot be overstressed: art objects are isolated, framed, self-contained entities created intentionally to afford *aesthetic appreciation to the distanced observer*, while natural objects are appreciated in their interrelation with other things, are open-ended, dynamic and eventful and are opportunities for *appreciative interplay of engaged self and world*. To attempt any sort of assimilation of the two is, clearly, untenable: they are utterly polarized by their natures and it debases both of them to collapse that distinction. Moreover, there are two additional features: a) at the centre of the art experience is the issue of aesthetic relevance; there is no such analogue in the appreciation of nature: b) in nature, the object is appreciated for what it is and for what sort of properties it has, while in art appreciation, there is a sense that the properties of the appreciator are in some way imposed on the object. Ultimately assimilation is a mistake as:

both works of art and natural objects are in appreciation more or less severed from their natures and their histories. Thus, both kinds of objects may be approached in the same way: as pure aesthetic objects. The result is one form of appreciation - aesthetic appreciation - which appropriately applies to any and all kinds of things. Art appreciation and nature appreciation collapse into one (Carlson, 1995, p.214).

The second main argument for the design appreciation of nature (which also attempts the assimilation of art appreciation and nature appreciation) is far more contentious and is rarely attempted in contemporary aesthetics, though it was taken far more seriously in the nineteenth century. The basic contention is that it is possible to argue for nature's having a creator, and, that, consequently, there is intention involved and that nature, therefore, has a design that may be appreciated. The overall view is that since the world is God's plan, there is no difference between art appreciation and nature appreciation as both are products of God's purpose and his design (Carlson, 1995, p.215). Against this, some authors, such as Nelson Potter, have reasoned that the argument is both naive, presumptuous, and anthropomorphic, as there is no way that we can know what God's intentions are, while the intentions of an artist, being human, are transparent, at least to some degree. On this particular score, there do seem to be justifiable grounds for rejecting the assimilation of nature appreciation

to art appreciation as long as such an attempt is grounded in the supposition that there is a similarity obtaining between the design aspects of art and natural objects. Oddly enough, though, the theistic view does provide one surprising aspect which is important for the appreciation of nature. God's handiwork must be seen in objects, so at least part of our appreciation must be of an object-oriented nature. And with object-oriented appreciation "the way we construe the object of appreciation - the general account or the story we accept about it - determines the nature of its appreciation. With paradigmatic works of art this fact is obscured, for there is little dispute and therefore no alternative stories about them" (Carlson, 1995, p.217).

Finally, with his fourth and final configuration, *nature and order appreciation*, Carlson finds his Josephine. Having rejected design appreciation as significant or even possible for nature appreciation, he takes up the theist position outlined above. What he finds attractive is that an individual selects objects of appreciation in a general nonaesthetic, nonartistic manner, seeking the stories which make the object "visible and intelligible". "Awareness and understanding of the key entities - the order, the forces which produced it, and the account which illuminates it - and of the interplay among them dictate relevant acts of aspection and guide the appreciative response" (1995, p.218).

What sort of story is appropriate, then, for his object-oriented appreciation of nature? Clearly, if one requires a story to explain the order of nature and the forces that have determined that order, it makes sense to look no further than science. For no alternative story can more adequately supply the object-orientated appreciation of nature, and reveal the biological, and geological evolutionary processes that have given rise to natural objects. Given that we would find it queer, even absurd, to seek the tales relevant for the aesthetic appraisal and appreciation of art objects outside mythology, psychology, history and the like, we should find it equally puzzling and meaningless to search for the appropriate stories for the appreciation of nature beyond its most illuminating and rigorous source: natural science. As Carlson puts it: "Awareness and understanding of evolutionary theory, for example, is relevant to appreciating the natural order as revealed in flora and fauna; without such knowledge the biosphere may strike us as chaotic" (1995, p.220).

Where nature so radically parts company with art, though, is that "the work of art is individual, original, while the environment repeats itself in variations" (Sepanmaa, 1988, p.64). This is certainly true, but it can also be maintained that nature is fundamentally seamless and that any feature may be interpreted according to the same basic story. No matter whether one's object is a scarab beetle, baobab, pangolin, short-grass prairie or even biome, an understanding of its natural history, no matter how rudimentary, together with a respectful acknowledgement of its otherness, will yield an appreciation of its meaning, significance, beauty and appropriateness. One does not necessarily need an appreciation of art to foster an appropriate appreciation of nature.

Carlson's paper may be seen to house two different issues: The first issue concerns in part his distinction of appreciation from disinterestedness; the second concerns his advocacy of the necessity of at least some knowledge of natural history, ecology and evolution for the appropriate appreciation of nature. In the remainder of this chapter I shall examine both questions by reference to articles by Arnold Berleant and Noel Carroll, respectively.

In his paper, "The Aesthetics of Art and Nature," Berleant ponders "whether there is one aesthetics or two, an aesthetic that encompasses both art and nature or one aesthetic that is distinctively artistic and another that identifies the appreciation of natural beauty" (1995, p.228). The cornerstone of Berleant's essay is his conception of the aesthetics of nature. In common with virtually every author discussed in this chapter, he rejects the futile task of assimilating nature appreciation into art appreciation for the very reason that disinterestedness and appreciation pull in opposite directions and are, consequently, thoroughly incompatible. Considering the traditional debate over the seemingly intransigent polarization of designed art objects and ordered natural objects, he insightfully asks if the distinctive appreciative attitudes appropriate to art and nature appreciation individually are actually, at root, perceptual or merely the product of theory. "A world of objects is easier to circumscribe and control, but is this the world of lived experience?" (1995, p.232). He also suggests that although the presence of a frame would seem to require a passive, contemplative attitude on the part of the perceiver in that everything of value in the work is contained within its physical boundaries, he argues that the frame does not completely circumscribe the aesthetic experience as the viewer is required as a *participant* for the work to reach its conclusion, fulfil its intention. In the

absence of an audience, a painting is just paint, canvas and wood. Its significance, its conceptual content, is animated by the concrete presence of an observer: "We are beginning to discover that the history of the modern arts is more a history of perception than a history of objects, and that perception, moreover, is not just a visual act but a *somatic engagement in the aesthetic field* (italics mine). Such a development the traditional object-orientated theory is hard put to account for" (1995, p. 233). This is truly iconoclastic. It introduces a crisis into the whole art/nature concept. If traditional aesthetics is so blinded by its objectivity as to neglect the lived perceptual dimension in the aesthetic experience of art, how can we hope to develop an aesthetic paradigm for nature appreciation when nature is even more resistant to reification? "If we are going to need a separate aesthetic for nature, why be burdened with a model so alien to experience?" (1995, p. 233).

Following the lead of thinkers as diverse as Immanuel Kant and Yi-Fu Tuan, he suggests that the notion of sublimity offers the potential groundwork for a unifying theory of art and nature appreciation. One feature is especially interesting. In the absence of comfortable human categories for coming to terms with the wild nature revealed in the encounter with the sublime, the notion of beauty becomes utterly polarized. On the one hand, 'free nature, however, is not necessarily beautiful nature - it can be threatening, frightening, or simply desolate. Nature is not beautiful simply because its space or forms are not (totally) man-made. But it is only in these forms that the particular beauty of nature can reveal itself'; while on the other hand, nature's beauty "is necessarily bound up with contingency; it affords the viewer the freedom to view and review himself and his world in a manner that it is not predetermined" (Seel, 1992, pp. 78-81). The openendedness of the encounter with the sublime can, therefore, be either profoundly disturbing or liberating. The notion of the sublime is particularly satisfying as it rejects any type of objectification that undermines the assimilation of art and nature. There are no conceptual impediments in the experience of the wild, unpredictable imperiousness of the sublime. There is only engagement, wonder and awe. There are no distanced vantage points from which to disinterestedly ruminate on ultimate purposes. Yet one does not have to endure the potential psychological torment associated with an encounter with the sublime to understand our basic participatory adherence in natural settings. "The boundlessness of the natural world does not just surround us; it assimilates us. Not only are we unable to sense

absolute limits in nature; we cannot distance the natural world from ourselves in order to measure and judge it with complete objectivity" (1995, p.236).

In short, we do not have to be caught up in the maelstrom of sublimity in order to understand our being-in-the-world as any participatory gesture or serious attempt at belonging will reveal that engagement is possible in the most mundane of locations. In our liberation from disinterested framing "we can take as much delight in profusion and continuity as we have been taught to find in symmetry and regularity" (1995, p.237). Berleant is not alone on this score. Joseph Kupfer (1997) states that contrast and opposition - light/dark, hard/soft, density/diffuseness - are shared by both the aesthetic experience of art and nature, though perhaps more dramatically in nature. The aesthetic experience of nature does, though, seem to possess qualities that are rarely, if ever, found in art, such as *profusion and continuity*, simplicity, anticipation, serendipity. In particular, though, he focuses on a distinction between "profusion" and "austerity". Experiences of the former are permeated by an ebullience of forms, sensible qualities, pattern and colour, density and texture, odour and sound - an "inexhaustible largesse" (1997, p.2) Profusion is commonly encountered in the experience of not just animate assemblages such as flocks of wading birds, but also in the contact with inorganic phenomena such as stars, clouds, snowflakes, pebbles in a stream and the like. Austerity, by contrast, is a repetitive system inherent in the perception of putatively stark landscapes such as desert, tundra, ice and sea. The sensory experience is relatively simple, and form and quality are pared down to essentials - it lacks the exuberance of the profuse. "Instead of the frivolity of ornamentation, there are clean lines, unrelenting" (1997, p.3).

With the notions of engagement and participation in hand, Berleant sets the stage for a single aesthetics for nature and art. Yet he eschews the tempting avenue of assimilation. Rather, he is convinced that there is a case to be made for the aesthetics of nature serving as the model for appreciating art, "for continuity and perceptual immersion occur in our experience of art as much as in nature" (1995, p. 238). In the perception of a sculpture, for example, neither the work nor the perceiver has the upper hand. The three-dimensionality of a sculpture means that the perceiver must move around the sculpture in order to fully appreciate it, which introduces a temporal dimension. The work and the perceiver, therefore, are engaged in the

mutual determination of the meaning and interrelation of each other in the concrete situation. Furthermore, although critics would like to maintain the dissimilarity of art and nature on the grounds that, though both may manifest order, nature is chaotic, unpredictable, Berleant counters thus:

While there is formal structure in a quartz crystal and a starfish as there is in the symmetry of the Taj Mahal and Notre Dame Cathedral, art, like nature, has its share of deliberate disarray. We can find as much disorder in the opening movements of Bach's great organ Toccatas in C major and D minor and in Debussy's through-composed songs as in the irregular curve of a beach or the scattering of daisies in a field (1995, p. 238).

Taking such a phenomenological tack, Berleant distances himself from virtually every author currently commenting on nature aesthetics. In rejecting altogether the subject/object split that bedevils all rational/objective discourses on the relation of art and nature aesthetics (including all theories that debate thought vs sensuous component, disinterestedness vs appreciation and the like all of which, whether embracing a subjectivist or objectivist bias, employ the same mode of reasoning, argue within the same rational/objective parameters), he unearths the most basic feature of aesthetic appreciation, and, in fact, the most basic human experience: our engaged, interrelated participation in being. Value inheres in situations, contexts, not solely in subject or object: "...It is not the thing but the atmosphere which is the primary partner of perception qua disposition" (Bohme, 1992, p. 100). All the troublesome cognitive squabbles are swept away by the acknowledgement of the simple perceptual immediacy we enjoy with others, be they art or natural objects as in this case, that we always possess as a given and that does not need to be argued for or justified and that, in fact, grounds all rational theorizing. As he states it:

What draws together natural beauty and the arts are some commonalities in our relation and response: Both can be experienced perceptually; both can be appreciated aesthetically; and more particularly still, both can function reciprocally with the appreciator, enticing the participant to join in a unified perceptual situation. Such appreciation requires a radically different aesthetic from eighteenth-century disinterestedness. I call this an aesthetics of engagement, and

it is one that environmental appreciation especially encourages (1995, p.239).

The second main issue meriting discussion from Carlson's paper concerns his advocacy of at least some knowledge of natural history, ecology and evolution for the appropriate appreciation of nature. Many authors, including myself, have difficulty with Carlson's conclusion. Though I agree that there is no doubt that an acquaintance with natural history can certainly enhance and deepen the appreciation of nature, I cannot accept that it is the sole avenue for engagement and appreciation. One, but not the only one. In agreement with both Hepburn and Carlson, I recognize that an inarticulate, self-indulgent "involvement" with nature both trivializes the aesthetic experience - there should be some relevant story directing the experience that deepens it, makes it meaningful, significant - and, more important, debases non-human beings by denying their transcendent otherness. Noel Carroll, for one, certainly appreciates Carlson's efforts, but regards them as unnecessarily limiting. To again employ Hepburn's schema, Carroll would argue that Carlson's sense of appreciation overemphasizes the thought-component at the cost of a diminution in the sensuous-component. Carroll argues, quite accurately and reasonably, that there are many people who are not naturalists who have profoundly moving experiences of nature without even a passing knowledge of, or interest in natural history, ecology or evolutionary processes. (The same may be said of many non-musicians who could not imagine a fulfilling life in the absence of music. I have often wondered if perhaps their experience may be even more intense than my own as a musician who cannot help but hear music in terms of chordal structure, counterpoint and the like. I cannot know if my partially mediated experience is greater or lesser than a non-musician's as I cannot often escape my propensity for hearing scales or modal clusters.) What is common to both the experience of nature and music, then, is that appreciation is simply an issue of being moved by one's engaging object: "We may appreciate nature by opening ourselves to its stimulus, and to being put in a certain emotional state by attending to its aspects" (Carroll, 1995, p. 245).

Carroll's paper centres on the analysis and criticism of three arguments from Carlson of which I shall only deal with the first. The argument revolves around Carlson's discussion of three competing models for appreciating nature: the object paradigm, the landscape or scenery model,



and the environmental paradigm. The first is the framed/unframed argument that has already been discussed at length in this chapter. But it has an interesting twist. If we remove a rock from its natural setting and place it on our mantelpiece, we are literally framing it. We also are aware that we can figuratively achieve the same result by means of our disciplined perceptual enframing skills activated by our direct experience of nature. In either case, the overall result is an object removed from its ecological and evolutionary context and, hence, divorced from the only source that can give it meaning and significance. But if it is unframed in both the literal and figurative sense, it is utterly indeterminate and unappreciable. "In the first case, the object model is insensitive; in the second, it is, putatively, inoperable" (1995, p.248).

The second is the landscape or scenery model which, again, has been dealt with, but Carroll adds that in regarding nature in the same way as art, there are two profound differences: the latter is primarily visual, while the approach to the former is synaesthetic; moreover, the latter is two-dimensional, while the former is three-dimensional: "It offers a participatory space, not simply a space that we apprehend from the outside" (1995, p.248).

The third, the natural environmental model of appreciation, is one of Carlson's but stems from a paper written earlier in his career, entitled "Appreciation and the Natural Environment" (1979). The central thesis is that nature must be taken as nature and not as art for the simple reason that art is static while nature is dynamic. Yet for appreciation of nature as nature we cannot see it as existing solely in and of itself; we need a range of relevant categories for determining it to some degree, to make it accessible. We need science as it supplies us with the knowledge that "guides us to the appropriate foci of aesthetic significance" (1995, p.249).

As we saw earlier, Carroll takes umbrage at the implicit suggestion that Carlson's theory is all-inclusive, exhaustive. In order to defend his arousal theory of nature appreciation, he admits that, though his theory might be understood as the imposition of emotional Gestalts on indeterminate nature, "nevertheless, there are features of nature especially in relation to human organisms, which, though they are admittedly 'selected', are difficult to think of as 'impositions'" (1995, p. 251). He employs the following example:

Certain natural expanses have natural frames or what I prefer to call natural closure: caves, copses, grottoes, clearings, arbors, valleys, etc. And other natural expanses, though lacking frames, have features that are naturally salient for human organisms - i.e. they have features such as moving water, bright illumination, etc. that draw our attention instinctually toward them. And where our emotional arousal is predicated on either natural closure or natural salience, it makes little sense to say that our emotional responses, focused on said features are impositions.

Though Carroll's central thesis is reasonable - that there is no real reason to take any appreciative approach towards nature as the gospel and that his view is just one possible route, no better or worse than any other - his essay is seriously marred by a failure to mount a distinct argument outlining his position, relying as it does mainly on an exposition of Carlson's views. Nonetheless, an attempt should be made at a distillation. His central image of appreciative arousal is a waterfall. He says that he is exhilarated by the grandeur of the waterfall. The exhilaration aroused by the waterfall is not inappropriate as the waterfall itself is grand. It:

meets the criteria of scale appropriate to grandeur, where grandeur, in turn, is one of the appropriate sources of exhilaration. In this case, our perceptual make-up initially focuses our attention on certain features of the natural expanse, which attention generates a state of emotional arousal, which state, in turn, issues in reinforcing feedback that consolidates the initial selective gestalt of the emotional arousal experience. The arousal model of nature appreciation has an account of how we isolate certain aspects of nature and why these are appropriate aspects to focus upon: that is, they are emotionally appropriate (1995, p. 252).

In other words, we do not require scientific understanding in order to be deeply moved by, and therefore appreciative of, a natural object: "the cognitive component of our emotional response does the job of fixing the aspects that are relevant to appreciation" (1995, p. 253). This would seem to fall prey easily to at least two criticisms. First, to use Hepburn's schema, this could only be seen as the apotheosis of the trivial. One can only be appreciative of the grandiose and spectacular? Surely not. I happen to be

very appreciative of a very plain, simple little grey-brown bird called a Dusky Robin that lives only in Tasmania. I cannot quite put my finger on it, but it just has a pleasant, unobtrusive demeanour and a quite musical, though brief, song. Perhaps that is the very reason I am attracted to this bird. I might even be the only one in the world who thinks so, yet that does not detract from the fact that the bird is appreciated, and appreciated in *inverse proportion* to its grandiosity. By Carroll's delineation of what is appropriate for appreciation, my sentiments would be inappropriate as they do not match the scale of the present spectacle. I find this most alarming, especially when we are talking about living, sentient beings and not just some dusty artifact in a gloomy museum.

Second, and this pretty well follows on from the criticism above, in the absence of natural history as a relevance gauge, what would the cognitive component of our emotional psyche make of a crocodile drowning a wildebeest? The intense revulsion, presumably, that would arise from such a scene (in the absence of a knowledge of ecology) would, seemingly, not be inappropriate as the emotion is on the same scale as the object. But is it? There is nothing at all rare, spectacular or significant about a crocodile feasting on a gnu. This makes Carroll's position even more untenable since the scene is not all that significant and, therefore, an emotional outburst would be inappropriate as it does not match the scale of the spectacle. So, while I agree that there may be a time and a place for the suspension of a reliance on natural historical knowledge, and, therefore, for simple visceral exhilaration, Carroll's argument is just too weak to be convincing.

### **Conclusion: How should we appreciate nature ?**

In the foregoing, I have attempted to draw out the approaches that dominate current thinking on the themes of natural beauty and natural aesthetics. Almost all of the authors presented are disillusioned by the trend in contemporary aesthetic philosophy to assimilate natural beauty into art beauty, something which has, until recently, received little, if any, challenges since E.H. Gombrich handed down the stone tablet ruling that appreciation could embrace only three central features: an initial design, the object embodying this design, and the individual who embodies the design in the object. This has, with few exceptions, effectively turned the majority of thinkers against traditional aesthetics. Most have, therefore, sought refuge in considerations of natural beauty and the appreciation it instills.

The major impediment, as we have seen, is that aesthetics cannot countenance the supposition that appreciation can ensue from an aesthetic experience where there is no artist present, and, hence, no intention grounding the appreciated object. This is metaphysical heresy as it does not allow for the ranking of objects against a normative standard of aesthetic success or failure. It places beauty in the eye of the beholder and, therefore, explicitly makes all objects equally worthy of appreciation, whether that appreciation is either serious or trivial.

One might think this if it were not for the fact that, though the role of the artist has been removed from the equation, there still remains a significant object and an appreciative audience. The presence of the intractable object means that a relevant, significant sense of appreciation should temper any proclivity toward aestheticism or narcissism. Hepburn laid the groundwork through a recasting of the subject/object relation as sensuous component/thought component, and through a consideration of the triviality or seriousness with which one can approach the notion of appreciation. His seminal contribution was that: "We might find an acceptable ideal for serious aesthetic perception in encouraging ourselves to enhance the thought-load *almost* to the point, but not *beyond* the point, at which it begins to overwhelm the vivacity of the particular perception"(1995, p. 73). His suggestion was that subjective perception requires some guidance in the form of an acquaintance with natural history in order to ensure that one's positive appreciation of an object is not irrelevant, that it is appropriately serious, and that the sensuous component does not overwhelm the thought component and, thus, trivialize the experience.

Following Hepburn's lead, we saw that two authors in particular, Sepanmaa and Carlson, and here, too, I would include Callicott (1974), treat the knowledge of ecology, in the case of Sepanmaa, and natural history in the case of the other two, as mandatory for any serious experience of appreciation. Where Sepanmaa ran aground was through his quixotic determination to wrest a consistent aesthetics of nature rooted in ecology which proved, ultimately, unfruitful. Carlson's more rigorous epistemology, however, placed him in a more compelling position. Through his reworking of the traditional aesthetic notion of disinterestedness - something considered anathema by virtually all of his peers - he argued that disinterestedness is not just the passive,

contemplative activity most would assume it to be, but a crucial feature of appreciation. Disinterestedness, as opposed to pure subjective annexation or assimilation which fails to give due acknowledgement to objects and their "otherness", is essential in that it is the means for accepting the knowledge essential for significant appreciation. He justified this insistence on the permissibility of having "knowledge about" (in the form of natural history) by including the following provisos (1995, p. 203): a) as long as it does not detract from the concrete experience (i.e. overwhelm the sensuous-component); b) as long as it is faithful to the expressiveness of the object, thereby respecting its "otherness"; and c) as long as it enhances and deepens appreciation for the natural object.

There are a few other minor configurations which I include here in the vague hope of achieving something resembling all-inclusiveness. Noel Carroll argued, quite justifiably, that though Carlson's contribution to the development of the concept of appreciation is monolithic, there is still room for alternate senses of appreciation, that knowledge of natural history is not necessarily a prerequisite for appreciation. I agreed that his "arousal model of nature appreciation", in extolling the virtue of an emotional, visceral response to nature is certainly acceptable; yet, I was unable to discern anything in his argumentation other than self-contradiction. Though not discussed in the text, or at least not at length, it is important to mention the works of the following: Yi-Fu Tuan (1995), who argues that, for some, true appreciation only occurs in settings where the subject is almost completely removed from a human social, cultural and historical context in extreme environments such as in deserts or polar regions. These regions are sublime as nature shatters the bounds that permit disinterested contemplation and assimilates the human presence; Donald Crawford (1995), who effects a straightforward, philosophically traditional case for the similarity of art objects and natural objects and, thus, for their assimilation due to their semantic similarity and employs Hegel's notion of spirit which explicitly treats natural objects as inferior to art objects due to their lack of intentionality with the result that, in comparing statues and rocks, even the most unsuccessful work of art has a greater perfection than the most beautiful rocks in that the former is animated by human spirit, self-conscious purpose (1995, p. 192). The great strength of Crawford's essay, however, is that he ultimately rejects the Hegelian aesthetics on the grounds that it is too broad and formal, that "it doesn't require perceptual discrimination and sensitivity to discern beauty" (1995, p. 192). Against the

search for the grandiose, the rare and spectacular, he suggests that the subtle differences obtaining between, say, a Norway spruce and a Scotch Pine may augment appreciation of beauty. His insistence on the subtle discrimination between natural objects which is made possible within natural historical parameters and which, therefore, enhances aesthetic appreciation, strongly commends this essay; Joseph Meeker (1972) and Tom Bartuska with Gerald Young (1975), who recognize the undeniable similarity of art objects and ecosystems in that: a) they share the elements and internal relationships of a phenomenally objective field; b) there is an awareness of form based on the relationships among objects in that field; and c) there is a high degree of unity, coherence and completeness; and Douglas Porteous (1996, p. 27ff) who, though it is not the central theme of his book, sheds light on the thought-component/sensuous-component through the right brain/left brain findings of cognitive psychology. Rather than embracing the phenomenological approach of Merleau-Ponty and Levin which treats perception and cognition as distinct, yet equally and always available modes of approaching Being, Porteous identifies the qualitative/quantitative distinction lying at the heart of the perceptual/cognitive distinction with left/right brain functioning. The right brain yields an *autocentric* view, while the left brain yields an *allocentric* view. The distinction is well known as the contrast between a subject-centred and object-centred perceptual bias. The left-brain, allocentric outlook is primarily visual, "cool", intellectual, distanced, detached, linear, manipulative, and orthodox and, as such, its appropriate mode of communication is the articulation of tangible detail through verbal expression. By contrast, the right-brain, autocentric outlook is synaesthetic, "hot", physical, engaged, experiential, hermeneutic, creative, interrelated and intuitive, and is predicated on pattern recognition expressible through eidetic (image) language. (1996, pp. 27-31). It is this latter, autocentric attitude which lies at the heart of the aesthetic appreciation of nature, in Porteous' opinion. For, unlike the distanced, allocentric attitude which "makes it easy to regard nature and environment as a series of objects worthy of disregard or exploitation" (1996, p. 31), the autocentric attitude, being primarily acoustic is thoroughly engaged by the natural setting. In being all-surrounding, more transitory, fluid and unfocused than visual stimuli, sounds entreat active participation in the aesthetic delineation of the setting (1996, p. 33). Though very reductionistic and far too concerned with praxis, in my view, Porteous' position certainly adds another dimension to nature aesthetics.

The most radical work being done on the theme of appreciation, however, is by Arnold Berleant and Gernot Bohme. They take all of the dichotomies such as subject/object, disinterestedness/appreciation, thought-component/sensuous-component and the like, and reject them all out of hand. Berleant argued for one aesthetic, an aesthetic of *engagement*. His central argument was that an art work requires the presence of a perceiver in order to achieve its communicative goal. This, then, suggests that neither the perceiver nor the work can have meaning independently of each other. There is, as he calls it, a "somatic engagement in the aesthetic field" which unites perceiver and object into a perceptual unity in which the interrelation of both, their equal participation in the mutual determination of meaning and significance, is made manifest as aesthetic appreciation. This is not the disinterested appreciation of an object's formal properties, but a "fascination with intricate detail, subtle tone, endless variety, and the imaginative delight in what we would call in a human artifact marvellous intention, all as part of an environmental setting with which we, as appreciative participants, are continuous" (1995, p. 238).

Berleant's aesthetics of engagement embraces three central features: *continuity* in that subject and object, self and world, are inseparable in the aesthetic field of somatic engagement; *perceptual integration* or synaesthesia which occurs as the perceiver opens himself up to the full resonance of meaning and significance available in the lived perceptual situation; and the *participation* which ultimately yields appreciation as the context takes shape and assumes meaning and significance. The three together offer tremendous potential for the groundwork of a phenomenology of music and nature which will be explored in the final chapter.

## 4 MUSICAL MEANING

It is interesting that, in the search for a new environmentally appropriate metaphysic grounded in the aesthetic value of nature, environmental aestheticians have systematically avoided the field of musical aesthetics. Though natural value construed as aesthetics rather than as moral value has its merits, one can wonder why natural aesthetics value should be limited to its visual or literary aesthetic yield. For as we saw in the last chapter, the assimilation of natural objects into art objects treats perception as a subject/object relation and employs objective language which is grounded in an epistemology antagonistic to an environmentally appropriate metaphysic.

The perception of music, however, may offer a sense of natural value which is more environmentally appropriate. Though musical perception may seem a strange thing to model natural perception on, the attempt may be justified by the fact that musical perception represents one example of a situation in which we all perceive phenomenologically: i.e., embodied self and engaging other, as equal participants, institute musical meaning in the concrete, perceptual situation. Music differs fundamentally from the visual and literary arts, then, in that its full significance is not, indeed cannot be, revealed objectively, independently of its eventful unfolding in immediate experience. The reason for this is that it does not have an extrinsic, but an intrinsic content; its meaning is not established by the identification of referents with reference, but through the concrete, participatory attempt to establish musical meaning. The essence of the musical "object" is not something that can be neutrally identified and received as property X existing independently of a distanced, disinterested subject. It exists only as long as self and other are united for the object's delineation in a thoroughly interrelated and engaged setting. Its meaning, unlike that of other art objects, is not fixed eternally, externally to itself by means of transcendental concepts. It is determined relationally through the joint operation of self and musical phenomena, or more exactly, *akumena*. As such the musical "object" always maintains its otherness through its resistance to its full conceptual reification. The perception and cognition of the musical object employs a unique epistemology which thoroughly precludes any mechanistic/reductionistic approach. It may perhaps be the case, then, that the moral concern for nature and its preservation that preoccupied



Hepburn, Carlson and Sepanamaa in the preceding chapter may get a stronger "hearing" through the description of the musical object, rather than through visual or literary objects. Consequently, the perception of musical *akumena* may more adequately or directly stimulate the sort of appreciation which is sought for natural objects.

It is the purpose of the present and final chapters, taken together, to argue for the phenomenological similarity of the perception of musical and natural objects in that neither need be understood solely in objective/reductionistic ways and that, perhaps, the appreciation of natural value may be analogous to the appreciation of musical value. Thus, the analogy may offer the groundwork for a more environmentally appropriate attitude than is provided by more objective, dualistic accounts. One of the central themes will centre on the expressive/evocative character of music in order to elucidate how the perception/cognition of music may offer a non-objective model for natural perception/cognition. An attempt will be made to show that the perception of music, even more fundamentally than the reading of poetry, may yield a sense of value, an appreciation, which may also obtain in the perception of natural objects. This is not to say that a musical appreciation of nature is superior in any way to the appreciation attending the poetic nomination of natural objects, but only that, in order to be meaningfully grasped, music steadfastly resists wholly objective interpretation. Its value grows out of tonal relationships and not out of a tone's correspondence with some extra-musical content. Like an ecosystem wherein species have no meaning in isolation, but only in their interrelation with other species in a continually evolving context, the musical opus is not a conglomeration of discrete tones, but a continuous process of interrelated tones which evolve as harmonies. Thus, while it may be possible to label chords as tonic, subdominant or dominant in the way that we affix names to species or ecological communities, the identification of chord progressions is not crucial for understanding a piece, and appreciating its significance.

Clearly, music can be reduced abstractly and theoretically to its component parts, to its harmonic units, chords which can be labelled as F minor seventh, B flat dominant thirteenth, E flat major ninth, for example. Yet its abstract, theoretical vivisection after the fact by the music critic is acknowledged to be solely heuristic, an evil made necessary by the intransigence of musical experience to its conceptual reification. Put

otherwise, if the import of a piece of music is to be communicated to someone who is not actually engaged in the work's concrete sounding, its meaning must be expressed in terms that are communally understood; hence, there is a somewhat objective vocabulary for describing music. Moreover, it may even be the case that a passing acquaintance with musical genres and styles, and perhaps some musical theory, may enhance its experience, may provide the relevant information which prevents its appreciation from becoming trivial, shallow. That is, a grounding in the basics of musical theory may approximate the role of natural history in setting significant parameters for the meaningful appreciation of natural objects that would be in keeping with Hepburn's and Carlson's argumentation.

### Music and Language

For some authors, however, it is not so clear that musical meaning is revealed phenomenologically in its immediate perception, and not objectively. In particular, Noam Chomsky (1957) and John Sloboda (1985) have attempted to demonstrate that, at a deep level, language and music share a common structure. Their assumption is that *phonology*, the division of sounds into communicative units, *syntax*, the combination of these units into "legal" or "illegal" sequences, and *semantics*, the meaning carried by such sequences, exist both in language and music (Sloboda, 1985, p. 11). Consequently, just as there are "correct" or "incorrect" statements in language, there are "correct" or "incorrect" musical statements. There is, then, a "natural" structure to both modes of communication: a subject-predicate structure to language and a tonic-subdominant-dominant-tonic structure to music. And the violation of these structures are *known to be wrong when heard*. For the moment we will ignore the proposition that musical structure is natural, not conventional, and the suggestion that music, being far less structurally complex than language (there are only sixty basic chords in Western diatonic harmony whereas there are countless nouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives in any number of languages), even makes assertions at all. These claims will be re-examined in the final section on the phenomenology of music.

What, specifically, Sloboda, a cognitive psychologist, has to say about *phonology* is that musical notes are perceived and meaningfully categorized in a manner similar to linguistic phonemes according to the frequency and

duration of their sounds (1985, pp. 24-31). His suggestion is that just as the meaning of a linguistic utterance is determined by the perception of vocal inflection - the slight rise or drop of the voice - so, too, the meaning of music involves a "categorical perception" of frequency variation which has semantic significance. His justification for such a conclusion is that musicians that he has tested will, when supplied the first and fifth notes of a triad, where the middle note, the third, which determines the triad to be major or minor, oscillates between the pitches that determine the chord as major or minor, categorically select a specific pitch in order to make the chord determinate in their minds. Whether true or not, what significance does this observation have? Just because a musician in a laboratory is required to establish a chord's major or minor tonality, what does this say about the resemblance of meaning in language and music as they are practiced in everyday life? Might it not be the case that the atmosphere of the lived context in which both are experienced, the perception of the meta-linguistic meaning inherent in vocal inflection, to use his example, is better understood phenomenologically rather than mechanistically and reductionistically? Might it not be more satisfyingly described in terms of the participation of self and interlocutor in an engaged setting, rather than as a neutral causal exchange between discrete, atomistic phenomena? If it is true that a musician will always categorically perceive the meaning of the tonality of a chord, and so determine it as major or minor, does he not, when he is liberated from the artificial constraints of the laboratory, take his cue from the chords that precede and ensue from the present chord, from the temporal movement of the piece in its dynamic entirety? Does not Sloboda's reductionistic approach unduly simplify and, therefore, distort and debase what is in fact a very rich, complex and profound perceptual experience? A very significant difference between a chord and a word is that the labelling of a single chord in itself, in isolation from its musical context, devoid of its interrelation with other harmonies, is meaningless. A chord is simply not the same as a word which always has denotative meaning in isolation as it is inextricably bound to its corresponding concept. The analogy, as a result, would seem to be facile, if not trivial.

Sloboda argues that the duration of a phoneme or tone is also a determinant of meaning in that duration, also, is categorically perceived. The analogy is so obvious that one can only wonder why he mentions it. Patently, the attack and decay of a phoneme or tone determines categorization and, therefore, meaning; clearly, the perception of the attack

of the phonemes "chop" and "shop" involves categorization in the establishment of meaning (1985, p. 29). But, though "chop" and "shop" are like tones in that they only have meaning in the context of their use in a sentence rather than by their articulation in isolation, they are unlike tones insofar as they are merely tools for imparting determinate information.

The attack and decay of tones, however, play a far more significant role in the determination of musical meaning. It is a fascinating aspect of music that tones played by different instruments, if the attack of the tone is not heard, sound identical as pure tones. The attack, then, is an absolute determinant of the overall colour and mood of the piece, not just a vehicle for establishing one definitive, denotative meaning. The decay of the tone, too, has great significance relative to the type of instrument which performs it. In orchestrating a work, the physical limitations of instruments with regards to melody, harmony and especially rhythm must be borne in mind. With certain instruments, such as woodwinds and brass, an individual tone may be prolonged up to the point that the musician runs out of air; their tones, consequently, decay more slowly than other instruments. Tones produced by strings may give the initial impression of deferring their decay, yet there are subtle breaks corresponding to the shift in the direction of bowing. Finally, sounds performed on percussion instruments, including the piano and the guitar, decay rapidly. (It should be mentioned, however, that the electrified versions of the latter allow for the indefinite decay of their soundings.) Clearly, then, if the composer's intention is to sustain or intensify a tone or harmony over any stretch of time, the physical limitations of the instrument must be acknowledged, and he must temper his arrangement accordingly. The point to be gleaned here is twofold: *first*, while the attack of a phoneme is an absolute determinant of the meaning of a phrase, the attack of a tone which often establishes its gestural significance in the overall mood of the piece, if unheard, may somewhat diminish the overall experience of the work, yet it will never preclude the perception of the meaning of the work as a whole; and *second*, the decay of a phoneme is always prescribed; in its role as merely a tool for importing information, its sounding is essentially percussive and punctual; its slow decay would only serve to annoy or disorient. In short, while the division of linguistic utterance into its component phonemes is necessary for communication, which unfolds serially, linearly, in order to establish a coherent linguistic utterance, the division of musical sound into its component tones is an impediment to communication as music unfolds cyclically, hermeneutically

in order to establish its meaning: a communicative resonance. In other words, a simple dialectic occurring between interlocutors demands that only one voice speaks at a time, yet for most types of music the intention is to create a harmony of voices, overlapping voicings. It would, therefore, seem that the simultaneous layering of phonemes, on the one hand, and tones on the other, yields polyphony in the case of music, and cacophony in the case of linguistic exchange.

With regards to the *syntactical* similarity of language and music, Sloboda rightly argues that there are grammatical rules in language which ensure that listeners will be able to sort utterances they hear into "acceptable" and "unacceptable" categories (1985, p. 33). He encounters difficulties, however, when he claims that:

If one were to consult any standard textbook on harmony, one finds that it contains a large set of prescriptions for the sequence of chords that are or are not permissible in tonal music (1985, p. 41).

His mistake is not so much that he conflates music and language by implicitly claiming that there can be acceptable or unacceptable categories for musical statements, but that the "textbook" he cites as a definitive authority on harmony could only be a textbook on classical harmony. There are rules of classical harmony that "forbid" the use of parallel fifths and octaves and which, therefore, would consider the employment of such sequences impermissible. (It must be said that the formulation of such rules, however, is highly selective and, in common with all attempts at the codification of theoretical rules, takes place after the fact and are but rarely appealed to in the composition of a work. Mozart, for example, heard concertos and symphonies in his head fully orchestrated in their entirety, and when he did commit them to manuscript form - usually to pay off his gambling debts - there was no shortage of parallel octaves.) In the case of twentieth century compositions, moreover, it seems possible to claim that great compositions represent a deliberate flouting of the "rules" of classical harmony. The permissibility/impermissibility of certain harmonic structures simply does not appear to have much purchase any longer. In classical harmony, the use of the flat-nine interval is deemed "unacceptable". Yet pianists such as Errol Garner, Duke Ellington and Herbie Hancock regularly broke or break this inviolable maxim; to such a degree, in fact, that the interval is now a mandatory voicing in every jazz pianist's arsenal. It is simply no longer the

case that a critic would or could take umbrage at such transgressions or claim that music employing such structures is meaningless. Clearly, musical meaning is less constrained by rule obedience than linguistic meaning. There is, then, a profound difference between the two.

Sloboda's attempted assimilation of music into language completely collapses when he abandons his scientific/reductionistic view of music and implicitly examines musical perception in a non-theoretical, experiential manner (1985, p.44). To maintain his thesis that subject-predicate form and tonic-subdominant-dominant-tonic are structurally identical, he must claim that the "violation" of such structures is impermissible or meaningless. This is easy to prove in the case of language; clearly, the phrase "ate cat dog the the", in violating subject-predicate form, is impermissible and meaningless. But does this hold for music? If one takes a rising melodic line of c, e, g, a in the key of C major which then resolves to g and attempts to harmonize it, by Sloboda's definition, the c, e, g forming the tonic chord makes the "a" which is not part of the tonic triad, an "a" in the f, a, c subdominant chord of F major which then *must* resolve to the dominant G chord of the C major scale. Only by this interpretation can the tonic-subdominant-dominant-tonic structure be maintained and, thus, make the chordal progression permissible and meaningful. Unfortunately though, this is not how the melodic line from Beethoven's piano sonata (Op. 14, No. 1) is harmonized. Though the c, e, g is from the tonic chord, the "a" is not from the anticipated f, a, c subdominant chord. Rather, it is an "a" from the chord of d, f#, a, the dominant chord of the key of G major, and the final g is not part of the c, e, g tonic chord of C major, but the "g" of g, b, d, the tonic chord of the G major key into which Beethoven has modulated. Beethoven, knowing that the listener would expect him to follow the normal tonic-subdominant-dominant-tonic pattern, deliberately thwarts the listener's expectations for aesthetic effect. What he does is, by Sloboda's characterization of musical structure, impermissible and meaningless. Yet, by general consensus, this harmonization is both beautiful and meaningful. The question of its impermissibility would, consequently, not seem to be at issue.

Even Sloboda must grant this and, for this reason, shelves his scientific analysis of musical structure in favour of a more phenomenological interpretation. He makes it clear that the structure of music does not resemble a linguistic structure that rigidly determines one's perception and

cognition of meaning. It is understood that a rigid tonic-subdominant-dominant-tonic structure, though correct, would not be as beautiful as what Beethoven in fact achieves. The surprising structural twist, in its sounding and perceptual reception, not in its intellection, is what determines the work's aesthetic quality and appreciation. Thus, in fact, Sloboda accepts the opposite of his thesis. He reveals that the very aesthetic qualities of the theme stem from the violation of accepted musical decorum, and the thwarting of what is musically anticipated. There is, then, a profound difference between the meaning of language and music. In language, it is assumed that speaker and listener abide by grammatical rules that assure unambiguous utterances and the reception of intended meaning. In music, however, the composer is not so rule-bound. In fact, the composer, as Sloboda himself states it: "...anticipates the strategies that a listener in his culture will use to structure his or her experience, and seeks to thwart these strategies in interesting ways" (1985, p. 51).

### **Music and Langer's Symbolism**

Though it must be concluded that Sloboda's attempt to establish a *semantic* identity between music and language fails, there have been other formulations which have fared better for not being so scientific and reductionistic. Susanne Langer's *Philosophy in a New Key* (1959), a seminal work in musical aesthetics, has, in particular, been considered to be the definitive work on language and music. What commends Langer's work is the philosophical rigour and scepticism that she brings to her specific interest. She takes pains, at first, to explain what she is not trying to demonstrate. For instance, she makes it clear that music is not a language in the normal sense. As she states it:

Music... is pre-eminently non-representative even in its classical productions, its highest attainments. It exhibits pure form, not as embellishment, but in its very essence; we can take it in its flower - for instance, German music from Bach to Beethoven - and have practically nothing but tonal structures before us: no scene, no object, no fact (1959, p. 209).

What, specifically, she is criticizing here, as many critics of musical expression have charged as well, is the hypothesis that music: 1) is expressive of the composer's emotions; and 2) that an audience, in hearing

the music will subsequently experience that same emotion. With regards to the composer's intention, she first ponders how a composer could possibly experience so many emotions in the composition of a single work. More important, though, she questions why a composer would select music, of all things, as a means of catharsis. As she puts it:

Sheer self-expression requires no artistic form. A lynching-party howling round the gallows-tree, a woman wringing her hands over a sick child, a lover who has just rescued his sweetheart in an accident and stands trembling, sweating and perhaps laughing or crying with emotion, is giving vent to intense feelings; but such scenes are not occasions for music, least of all composing (1959, p. 216).

In short, a punch or a glare is a better avenue for expressing anger than composing an agitated movement of a sonata.

Having reasoned that music does not imitate or represent a specific human emotion, and is not aesthetically good or bad to the degree that it succeeds or fails to express emotions, Langer seeks to account for why people are powerfully affected by music. She grants that "music is known indeed, to affect pulse-rate and respiration, to facilitate or disturb concentration, to excite or relax the organism, while the stimulus lasts..." (1959, p. 212). The point she raises in her second criticism is that the attachment of emotion to such responses is based on an inference that the emotion must be in the music and that we experience the particular emotion in some determinate, causal fashion. She argues that this emotional identification merely reflects a psychological fact that people tend to associate feelings with music. And, in her view, this is only a response to sound in general, not music specifically. Such a response is no different to experiencing fear upon hearing a fire-alarm. As she facetiously, yet trenchantly, inquires: "if music really grieves or frightens us, why do we listen to it" (1959, p. 214)?

Having dismissed musical expressiveness as a kind of language that can convey specific emotions, Langer centres her attack on Schopenhauer's thesis that music is a real language with a conceptual content, "...an impersonal, negotiable, real semantic, a symbolism with a content of ideas, instead of an overt sign of somebody's emotional condition" (1959, p. 219). Though Schopenhauer did not sufficiently expand on this analogy, Langer interprets him as saying that there is an "ideational content... embodied in



the *language* [italics mine] of tones" (1959, p. 219). That is, there is a causal quality to music, especially programme music, that permits and insists that the listener affix a specific emotional concept to a musical tonality. That there is a one-to-one correspondence, therefore, between tones and extra-musical contents, in Langer's interpretation of Schopenhauer, is refuted. Certainly, some composers, notably Berlioz and Delius, have used this technique with questionable results: the head falling from the scaffold represented by tympani in Berlioz's "Symphonie Fantastique" and the cuckoo chiming, on beat, in Delius' "Two pieces for Small Orchestra". One can wonder, however, whether there would be one-to-one correspondence between tone and concept were it not for the presence of the text: Does the music itself, alone, force the listener to imagine specific objects? Furthermore, does not this use of music as a linguistic avenue diminish the aesthetic quality and *autonomy* of the music? One eighteenth-century critic, J.A. Huller, certainly thought so. He condemned onomatopoetic programme music rather severely. As he put it in his review of one such work: "There one can hear clocks striking, ducks jabbering, frogs quacking [*sic*], and pretty soon one will be able to hear fleas sneezing and grass growing" (Langer, 1959, p. 220). In fairness to Schopenhauer, he may not have had programme music in mind when he claimed music to be semantic. If, however, Langer's interpretation is at all accurate, one would have to conclude that the onomatopoetic use of music, the use of music as a mimetic language, would, at least partially, appear to diminish the aesthetic value of the music by making it so utilitarian.

But, though Langer is strongly critical of the thesis that a specific content can be represented in music, she does not altogether reject the view that music conveys something and is, therefore, meaningful. Her contention is not that a composer expresses a specific emotion through his/her music, but imparts his/her understanding of human feeling in general. She captures it in this way:

Music is not self-expression, but formulation and representation of emotions, moods, mental tensions and resolutions - a 'logical picture' of sentient, responsive life, a source of insight, not a plea for sympathy. Feelings revealed in music are essentially not 'the passion, love, or longing of such-and-such an individual's inviting us to put ourselves in that individual's place, but are presented directly to our understanding, that we may grasp, realize, comprehend these feelings,

without pretending to have them or imparting them to anyone else  
(1959, p. 222)

In short, the composer articulates a generalized form of emotion that is linguistically ineffable, but which is received as symbolic of something. The individual listener recognizes this and attempts to discern the work's meaning. Langer, however, does not want the reader to take the word "symbolic" too literally. She will not go so far as to explicitly state an analogy between linguistic phonemes and musical tones as Sloboda does. Rather, all she claims is that semantic musical units can be combined in myriad ways, that they are easily "distinguished, remembered and repeated: and finally, they have a remarkable tendency to modify each other's characters in combinations as words do, by serving each as a context" (1959, p. 228). Fortunately, she declines to make the resemblance more specific usages and refuses to mount a full-blown defence of music as a language. In fact, in order to prevent the reader from asking too much of the resemblance, she explicitly denies that music is a language with a vocabulary, as she admonishes:

To call the tones of a scale its 'words', harmony its 'grammar', and thematic development its 'syntax', is a useless allegory. For tones lack the very thing that distinguishes a word from a mere vocable: fixed connotation, or 'dictionary meaning' (1959, p. 228).

Langer's final exposition is even more carefully phrased and guarded than the last; it is even seemingly apologetic. On page 241, she claims that: "in music we have an unconsummated symbol, a significant form without conventional significance..." Her reason for this final characterization of symbolism seems clear enough. She wants the reader to in no way assume that musical meaning can be captured in language or is amenable to objective scrutiny, discursive reason. Rather, in the end, she seems to call for a phenomenological approach to music. She makes it evident that since significance is not conventionally fixed and that, consequently, the attempt to label is wrong-headed; significance must be established relationally, situationally, through the immediate experience of music. She will not specifically espouse a phenomenological approach, however. She assumes that such a subjective approach will result in a pre-occupation with one's feelings (an over-emphasis on the sensuous-component as Hepburn would say) and, as a result that appreciation of the "object" in its otherness will be

neglected. But, neither does she want to defend a symbolist approach; for, in so doing, she would have to defend the attempt to apply objective tags - something which, in over-emphasizing the thought-component, distances the listener, and abstracts away from the musical experience, thereby dissipating the relational generation of musical significance. Her argument, then, is an attempt to balance the objective, symbolist position and the subjective, emotive position. In claiming that music imparts only the generalized form of emotion, she combats the solely subjective, emotional response to music. And in arguing that music imparts only an "unconsummated symbol", she precludes the application of specific, objective, abstract concepts to music. Though one can, sceptically, ask how Langer can demonstrate that a generalized form of emotion - which is ineffable - exists and why she must reject a phenomenological approach that seems to offer so many solutions to her various concerns, it is probably better to place such questions in abeyance for the moment. These will be explored presently. It should be said, though, that her attempt to reconcile emotive and symbolist positions is, all in all, quite satisfying.

### **The Expressionist Theory of Musical Meaning**

Langer, though, does have her critics. Peter Kivy, in particular, assails her, not for her statement that music is, to some degree, similar to a language in that it conveys an "unconsummated symbol", the generalized form of emotion, but for her conclusion that music does not express specific emotions. In *The Corded Shell* (1980), Kivy's central task is to temper respectable "scientific" analyses of music with accounts of musical expressiveness. In short, he wants emotive descriptions to be deemed respectable and, thus, seeks to demonstrate that they can be "objective" in the sense of having inter-subjective validity and application.

His launching-point and the nexus of his reasoning revolves around a distinction he draws between something "expressing X" or being "an expression of X" and something being "expressive of X". A shout and a clenched fist are said to be "expressions of X" as they are logically dependent upon a subject's actually being angry. To say that a St. Bernard has a sad face, however, is not to say that its face "expresses" sadness. For, in order for that to be true, the dog would actually have to be sad. Instead, the St. Bernard's face is said to be "expressive of" sadness: such a claim is logically independent of how the dog feels.

The importance of this distinction cannot be overstated as Kivy wants to claim that traditional theories of musical expressiveness all treat expressiveness as "expressing X" or being "an expression of X" and have, as a result, failed. For it is obvious to Kivy that emotions are not in music and, hence, that expressiveness is not logically dependent on the music having this or that emotion. What he seeks to show is that music is "expressive of" specific emotions, not just the generalized form of emotion that Langer discusses. His task, then, is not one of proving logical entailment, but of showing that, psychologically, listeners tend to attach specific emotions to musical works insofar as something in the music resembles human emotive expression. He, consequently, rejects what he calls the "arousal speech theory" of musical expressiveness which he characterizes in the following manner:

1) music is sad (or cheerful, or whatever) in virtue of its arousing sadness in the listener; 2) it arouses sadness by resembling, musically, the speaking voice when it arouses sadness; for 3) the listener recognizes the likeness and feels an appropriate emotion by a kind of sympathy, or fellow-feeling, much as I might be saddened by the sadness of a friend (1980, p. 22).

Such a theory is perhaps easily dismissed. As Langer indicates, if one really does experience sadness or anger, etc. in the experience of music, why would anyone subject oneself to the music? Furthermore, instrumental music, melodically, is far more complex than the human voice when it expresses emotion. It is, therefore, difficult to understand musical expressiveness solely as the function of an analogy with the impassioned speaking voice. Music just does not have the causal ability to arouse specific emotions in the listener, in Kivy's view.

Kivy's arguments all stem from what he refers to as the "cognitive speech theory" which he delineates in the following manner:

1) music is sad (or cheerful or whatever) in virtue of its representing the expressive tones and other expressive characteristics of the human voice; 2) the listener recognizes and identifies these musical 'icons'; 3) this recognition, in turn, triggers an emotion in the listener, not necessarily the one represented in the music" (1980, p. 24).

Though, for the reasons cited above, Kivy must reject speech as the sole bearer of expressiveness, this is his basic argument; all he does to amend the argument is to replace "speech" with "utterance" - the sum total of human expressive behaviour. The argument, as it stands, is not all that different from Langer's in that it treats musical expressiveness as "expressive of" rather than as "expression of". It differs, however, in that Kivy accepts, while Langer rejects, the hypothesis that expressive means "expressive of" particular human emotions. Rather than music *arousing* specific emotions, then, musical expressiveness is seen by Kivy as the result of a cognitive act on the part of the listener who, in hearing the music, understands the resemblance between the musical "icon" and a specific human emotional utterance and then supplies the appropriate emotive label.

How exactly does this take place? What is a musical "icon"? Against Langer's charges which reasoned that there are no rules for establishing that a specific piece has "objective" property X, that music lacks distinct meanings, and is, therefore, not a language, not strictly symbolic, Kivy counters that the cognitive speech theory of musical expressiveness does not claim that music is symbolic. He maintains that Langer's definition of meaning is too limited, that one does not need to construe expressiveness as a one-to-one correspondence between musical icon and abstract concept. To state that emotions are recognized is not to commit oneself to a semantic theory of musical expressiveness, in Kivy's view. As he states it: "we recognize sadness in the St. Bernard's face, but need not say that the St. Bernard's faces *means* sadness" (1980, p. 49). The St. Bernard's face does not need to be seen as symbolic or as an exemplification of sadness. He further reasons that:

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The tailor's green swatch is not a sample of green, does not exemplify green, is not, hence, a symbol of green merely in virtue of being green. It must also function, in some sort of system, as a sample, as an exemplification, hence as a symbol. Not everything that is green so functions, which is why not everything green is a sample, exemplification, symbol of green (1980, p. 61).

Kivy's opinion, then, is just that one recognizes the resemblance between the musical icon and the human emotion. One does not require a strict denotative connection to establish this resemblance as expressive.

A serious objection that can be levelled against Kivy's thesis, however, is that we hear music, but we do not hear the posture and movement that he includes under the rubric of human "utterance". This is not as insignificant a point as it might seem initially. Even if his theory could be maintained at a cultural level, even a societal level, it fails when tested against the human "utterance" inherent in other cultures. With regard to the difficulties of associating a piece of music with universal human utterance, Pamela Harris has this to say:

I experienced this in hearing traditional music played by the Guambiano Indians of Colombia. They described it as joyful wedding music. To me, this music sounded pensive rather than joyful, and I was quite surprised to learn that it was wedding music (1989, p. 28).

Throughout, Kivy relies on visual and literary analogies to demonstrate how we find music expressive. On pages 57-58, he argues that a circle with three lines on it where eyes and a mouth would be on a face will be seen as a face. He suggests that: "just as we see the face in the circle, and the human form in the wooden spoon, we hear the gesture and the utterance in the music, and not another thing." The analogy is so facile as to lack credibility. It is not enough to conclude, from the observation that an almost exclusively visual species animates visual phenomena, that we animate sounds as well. Since a stare is usually associated with an intention to predate, the capacity to discern the significance of another's aspect is of critical importance. Sounds have nowhere near the same force, save for alarms or sirens, perhaps, which are, by their nature symbolic, established by convention. It should also be stated that I do not have any difficulty with Kivy's phenomenological characterization of the gestural, bodily significance of the musical experience, but only with his more specific claim that we hear music as speech, utterance (1980, p. 58).

In fairness to Kivy, this particular argument is not all that central to his overall strategy. But it does reflect the vagueness of his generalizations concerning human psychology (which, ironically, forms the ground of his attack on Langer's hypothesis of the "unconsummated symbol"). The far more important criticism is that he justifies his theory of musical expressiveness by reference to music that is attached to a text. In Chapter Eight, he cites two famous examples in which there is a mismatch between music and text as examples of our perception of musical expressiveness. The

first (1980, p. 71) is an aria from the last act of Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*. Barbarina has lost a pin and sings "Oh how dreadful. Have I lost it?" What is interesting about the passage is that the music's sadness is completely out of proportion to the sadness expressed in the text; it is seemingly more appropriate to the loss of a lover than the loss of a pin. It is immediately clear to the audience, then, that the expressiveness of the music and the text pull in opposite directions. What is important, then, is not just that the music apparently has an expressiveness independently of the text, but also, against Kivy's thesis, appears to militate against its easy categorization as expressive of a distinct, determinate emotion.

"Che farò senza Euridice", from Gluck's opera *Orfeo*, too, represents a mismatch of text and music (1980, pp. 73-75). The disparity is even more pronounced, though; for the expressiveness of the music is not just out of proportion to the expressiveness of the text, but is, in fact, at odds with it. The profound sorrow expressed by Orfeo at the loss of Euridice is belied by the up-beat major tonality of the music. The expressiveness of the music is not appropriate, then, because it exceeds the expressiveness of the text as in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, but, by contrast, because it is utterly unsuitable. As Eduard Hanslick remarked: "one could just as well or, indeed, much more faithfully set the opposite words to the same tune ("I have found my Euridice, nothing can equal my joy")" (1957, p. 24).

But while Hanslick mentions *Orfeo* in order to show that music is not expressive of emotions, Kivy wants to demonstrate that the expressiveness of music is established by the conventional association of specific emotions with specific musical structures. That is, while Hanslick considers music to be expressively neutral and ambiguous, that expressiveness can only be communicated by a text, and that, therefore, in the absence of text, a disparity of expressiveness can exist between music and text, Kivy claims that the music itself is expressive of a specific emotion and that its appropriate union with a text is, consequently, immediately grasped by the listener. Unfortunately for Kivy, though, he can cite no example of a musical work's being expressive independently of its conjunction with a text. It is, therefore, difficult for him to maintain that music is not expressively neutral. It would seem that Hanslick is right, or, at least, that his objection cannot be met.

Moreover, Kivy is adamant that the ability to identify certain emotions is not grounded in any semantic, symbolic relation between tones and concepts. Yet, at the same time, while rejecting the possibility of conventional meanings being rule-governed, he claims, on page 67, that there are "public criteria for expression". But if conventional musical associations are communally described and promulgated, it would seem that there is a meaning connection between tones and emotions, not just resemblance. If there is public agreement concerning expressiveness, a consensus in the application of a concept to a musical structure, then there must be denotative meaning.

Perhaps the most damaging criticism of Kivy's thesis is that, as he himself argues:

even if the theory of expressiveness proposed is for the most part correct, it is completely trivial. For to call a work of art X, where "X" names a nontrivial property, the possession of X must be directly relevant to our evaluation of the work. But it is not directly relevant to our evaluation, at least of "pure", textless, programless, instrumental music that it does or does not have this or that expressive property: it is not the better or worse for being sad or cheerful, or any such thing. Therefore, sadness and happiness, and other expressive properties of music are trivial properties, and the theory that explains them, a trivial theory - of no importance to the philosophy of art (1980, p. 112).

As it is stated, this argument does not represent a criticism only of Kivy's theory, but for all instances of arousal theory. What the arousal theory must defend is that, not only are the expressive properties of music dispositional, but that such properties are relevant to the judgment of the goodness or badness of music and, as such, are non-trivial. The usual line, run by arousalists, is that since there are states of mind which are intrinsically valuable, such as happiness, any music which has the dispositional ability to arouse them is instrumentally good.

There is an array of difficulties with this argument. Even if it can be maintained that music has this dispositional character, is instrumentally good, is it *aesthetically* relevant that a piece can, say, cheer us up?



Surely that is not the only reason that we listen to music and find it valuable? Moreover, even if it could be maintained that cheerfulness is an "objective" property of music, why should music be considered better or worse to the degree that it has objective expressive properties, rather than none at all? Being happy is a good for humans, but is it for music? Furthermore, utility-value would appear to hold only for crafts and not for art. Ultimately, it would just seem to be the case that the search for expressive properties in music yields the following dubious, seemingly unanswerable, results: 1) even if music could possess objective expressive properties - which is highly debatable - does this make it intrinsically valuable?; 2) does it not debase music to treat it solely in terms of its utilitarian functioning?; and 3) is it not the case that, in being preoccupied with questions of what music can do to improve our mental state, we lose sight of the music's significance *qua* music, and in determining its value solely in terms of the degree that it succeeds or fails to promote psychological integrity, we are explicitly trivializing the musical experience?

### **The Formalist Theory of Musical Meaning**

In order to reveal why theories of musical expressiveness cannot demonstrate that a specific piece has an emotive content or that it even has an objective, conceptual content at all, it would seem prudent to contrast such theories with a formalist account of musical meaning. In particular, Eduard Hanslick, in his search for the ultimate aesthetic principles of music, what it is about music that makes it beautiful, reasons that it is unacceptable to take the representation of emotions as the essence or purpose of music. He argues that, since different listeners may hear different things in a piece of music- e.g. one may hear the representation of anger and another the representation of piety - we lack unanimity in our judgment of what the piece's content is, and, thus, cannot account for its beauty. But it is not just that we lack a consensus of what constitutes the beautiful in music (we may in fact agree on what is being expressed, what the music is "expressive of") that presents problems. Rather, what he maintains is that it is meaningless to claim that music can represent anything. "A rose is fragrant, but we do not say that its content is the representation of fragrance" (Hanslick, 1957, p. ii). It is the notion of representation itself that presents logical difficulties. For to represent something involves the intentional relation of two dissimilar things through a mental act, involves the attachment of concepts extrinsic to an object. And this is impermissible in the case of music, in

Hanslick's view. For, as he understands it, the content of music is specifically musical; its meaning and value "is solely in its tonal connections without reference to an extraneous, extramusical content" (1957, p. iii). The content of music, then, is pure form, not emotions, and its essence is not to arouse emotions, but to engage, to stimulate the active imagination of the listener to a contemplation of its formal beauty.

Hanslick's central concern, then, is to establish the beauty and autonomy of the musical object. He, consequently, seeks to evince how music does not possess transcendent meaning. It is not necessary to elaborate his first argument as it has already been dealt with in this chapter. Suffice it to say that, in common with Langer and Kivy, he rejects any sort of arousal theory of musical expressiveness on the grounds that: "the connection between a piece of music and changes in our feelings is not one of strict causation" (1957, p. 9). His second argument, however, revolves around the distinction between literary or visual art and music. He reasons that music is unique in that its content is not the representation of emotions that can be identified by means of an objective concept. The argument is simple: any emotion which we experience is made specific, can be labelled as "hope" or "melancholy", only by reference to the object that is hoped for or longed for. But since music cannot represent the specific concepts which determine feelings to be of a particular nature, neither can it represent these specific emotions. Moreover, it is no better to claim that, perhaps, music can represent unspecific emotions as Langer maintains. For it only makes sense to speak of something being represented once it has been identified, has had a concept applied to it. To have an emotion at all is to classify it, to make it conceptually determinate. Thus, to make any reference to an emotion is to employ a concept. And the only way to represent that emotion is by means of its concept. Hence, to say that an unspecific emotion can be represented is absurd. Hanslick, thus, would seem to be justified in asserting that "unspecific" and "represented" entails a contradiction (1957, p. 28).

The logical error committed by "heteronomists" - those who accept that music makes reference to an extrinsic content - is in assuming that the meaning of music is conceptual. Yet, there cannot be any necessity obtaining between the arrangement of certain tones and the experience of specific emotions. But, that music cannot make reference to concepts does not mean that music does not express any ideas whatsoever. Hanslick argues that there are a range of ideas relating to the motion and intensity of music

which we can justifiably appeal to when speaking of a particular work (1957, p. 14). Since there is a basic isomorphism of the dynamics of music and the dynamics of our mental states, we can claim that, to some degree, that the physical manifestation of music in sound, its speed and intensity, can match our emotional states quite non-arbitrarily. We can justifiably describe both the particular tonal groupings in a piece and the specific quality of an emotional state as being "calm" or "violent". For such concepts may be said to capture the physical nature of sound in general. We must be careful, however, when we move beyond the ascription of calmness to a particular tonal quality to claim that it expresses "love" or "fear". For when we start using such concepts in relation to a work's meaning, we are no longer referring to ideas that music can express. Given that there is no necessary correspondence between the tonal relations of a piece and abstract concepts, we are not revealing anything about the essence of music if we rely on such concepts. We have mistaken the actual content of music when we treat it as solely conceptual.

What about the apparent fact of our always responding to certain tonalities in the same way, of, for example, always experiencing joy in the sounding of certain chords? According to Hanslick, there is still no necessity to this relation and, therefore, we cannot claim that joy is expressed by certain harmonic structures (1957, pp. 16-17). Rather, such a relation between musical structures and a particular mental state is only the result of a well-established association. The relation is only symbolic, and is no more necessary than the stipulation that a certain word is to stand for a specific concept. The relation is no more necessary than the conventionally established symbolism that obtains between a red light and the command to stop. The association of symbol and response is both initially arbitrary and wholly utilitarian. The same holds true for music; a tonal cluster and its association with a specific emotional response is arbitrary. Music, in itself, is neutral and ambiguous.

An additional difficulty that Hanslick has with heteronomists, as opposed to autonomists who accept that music has only intrinsic meaning, is that they confuse musical logic with propositional logic (1957, p. 42). He does, however, acknowledge that this confusion is understandable, in some sense, in that there is a similarity between the logic of propositions and the logic of musical phrases. There is, for instance, a primitive "recognition", an intuitive understanding, which allows us to distinguish between

propositions which express "genuine thoughts" or "empty phrases" (1957, p. 42). It is this recognition that allows us to grasp the "rational coherence of a group of tones". There is, then, a similarity between propositional and musical "sentences" in that they both have sense and logic. The resemblance should not be overestimated, however, as the two types of logic are of a radically different order. Musical logic is dependent on the correct relation of tones, while propositional logic is grounded in the coherence of concepts. Our response to musical or propositional statements differ in significant ways. Upon hearing or reading a proposition, we recognize the words being used, and know the concepts which they symbolize. Hence, the meaning that we derive from a proposition is based on the translation of what is stated to what it designates. We are also aware that such a relation has been arbitrarily instituted, and that the symbol lacks intrinsic significance. In a musical sentence, by contrast, there is no distinction between the symbols - the tones heard - and the musical ideas they embody. There is no representation as there is no distinction between what is meaningful in the musical experience and its mode of presencing itself. In short, what is expressed in music cannot be translated. Words and tones, by their very natures, simply cannot be used interchangeably to express an idea.

This distinction in hand, Hanslick argues for the distinctive nature of music that sets it apart from the visual or literary arts. He states that: "every art has its own range of ideas which it represents in its own medium of expression, eg. tones, words, colours, stone" (1957, p. 11). As we saw in the last chapter, whatever is expressed in the visual or literary arts is amenable to conceptual description, analysis and evaluation. As long as a work is intentionally created, is deliberately framed for its aesthetic reception, it has a conceptual dimension. Even a blank canvas, as long as it has been intentionally fabricated, has at least a basic conceptual content made accessible through a suite of concepts such as "blank", "white" or "square".

Where music parts company with other art forms is that its content is nothing more than the expression of a purely musical idea by means of "tonally moving forms" (1957, p. 59). Since the logic of music cannot be expressed in linguistic propositions, it defies description. Its essence is wholly autonomous. Hence, Hanslick would appear to be utterly justified in stating that: "what in every other art is still description is in music already metaphor" (1957, p. 41). That the content of music is wholly autonomous, it

follows that any attempt to argue for the thesis that music represents concepts is misguided and fruitless.

What, moreover, distinguishes music from the other arts is that what makes it beautiful is uniquely musical. In the visual and literary arts, the appreciation of beauty grows out of the capacity of the perceiving subject to understand its conceptual yield. The degree to which the individual work succeeds or fails to establish the correspondence between references and referents, therefore, determines whether or not it is received as aesthetically good or bad. Importantly, this means that non-musical arts can embody ugly or disturbing contents as long as their symbolizations are aesthetically effective. Yet, by contrast, since music cannot represent anything beyond its unfolding in tonally moving structures, claims that it can be ugly have no purchase.

### **A Phenomenology of Musical Meaning**

So where is musical meaning? Why is music important to us? If it is not emotive and not cognitive, what is there in music that moves us, makes us put on Marley (say) and not Stravinsky? The short answer, from Chapter Two, is the listening stance which includes felt significance, attuned comportment, and creative expression: response-ability/answer-ability. These will be dealt with in order. What do we feel as significant in the hearing of a piece of music? I think that we could claim, first off, that we have a communication and communion with the source of soundings. Following Langer, "music" (organized sound, provided by the composer) is an expression of forms of sentience: 1) it grows, attenuates, flows, slows, embodies conflict, resolution, speed, arrest, silence and is profoundly gestural; 2) it is not a symbolism, not a series of symbols, transcendentally deciphered, nor a language (for in language, symbolism exists as a simple one-to-one correspondence between words and conceived items of experience; yet music lacks fixed association, a single, unequivocal, conventional reference); 3) music would seem to exemplify a whole Gestalt experience in that its character is immediate and inter-relational: no tone makes sense in isolation, but only in its temporal presence as a focal now receding gently onto its horizontal resolution (the solo against its sedimented chordal structure); 4) music embodies this rhythm of horizontal waxing and waning, engages and invites, yet maintains its opacity and transcendence (and, in so doing, underscores the importance of

improvisation and hermeneutic up-dating on the part of the listener and performer who has consummated the musical moment of shared meaning); 5) the elements of music not only fuse together to yield a greater entity (a synergism, like an ecosystem, wherein something emerges or is created beyond the simple enumeration of individual elements, but also wherein individual species maintain their transcendent status in a complex of inter-relation; 6) music resonates with structure, pattern and significance amenable to reason, yet a reasoning that is not discursive; 7) music is ineffable, but open to a respectful encounter with its resonating presence; it, therefore, eluminates the field of prepersonal, prelinguistic embodiment and is valuable for demonstrating the centrality of the listening stance at the core of transpersonal care and concern, and 8) music develops through tonally moving forms in a realm of pure/virtual duration. This is measured in terms of sensibility (Heidegger's modal presencing), qualitative tensions and ontological discourse, aesthetic appreciation. Tones move in relation to each other - always and only to each other - in virtual, phenomenological time. Janus-faced, they point backwards and forwards in a whole temporal thrust which both establishes/grounds their significance and anticipates their contextual and evolutionary renewal.

The point of the remainder of this chapter, then, is to reason that the examination of the perception of music provides a workable model for the elucidation of the transpersonal ecological enterprise, when transpersonal ecology is defined as "...the this-worldly realization of as expansive a sense of self as possible in a world in which selves and things-in-the-world are conceived as processes". In that the essence of music is temporal, eventful and the self is truly limited in its ability to abstractly conceive of that movement, the attempt to draw an analogy between the perception of music and the aims of transpersonal ecology might be justified.

So let us begin with a consideration of how the perception of music might elucidate the three important elements of appropriate worldly behaviour, being-in-the-world, spelt out in Chapter Two: 1) felt significance; 2) at-tuned comportment; and 3) creative expression, ontological discourse.

### **Felt Significance**

As we saw in Chapter Two, the phenomenological reduction reveals the *Logos* of embodied self and engaging other in the primordial situation. At

root, the acknowledgement of the invitational other by the transcendent self involves an *ecart* wherein the *ek-stase* of the situation is set into motion as a type of on-going conversation. It may seem that music, then, being, for the most part, ineffable, except by means of abstract formalist or expressionist theoretical accounts, is non-conversational. Yet, it may be argued that few items of experience are as immediately meaningful, and profoundly significant as music. How can this be possible, though, if we assume that meaning is predicated on cognition and rational discourse? How can music be said to be meaningful? What is it about music, fundamentally, that sets it apart from the other arts and other types of experience?

To answer this, the first step is to bracket any attempt at rational description, and analytic evaluation, to let music sing for itself at the level of its most immediate perceptual encounter. How do we hear, and what do we encounter in, music at this level? One answer is supplied by Susanne Langer who maintains that there are both passive and active responses to music heard. She has this to say about the distinction (1953, p. 136):

...passive hearing takes in 1) absolute pitch (even if we cannot name the tones); it has a certain lowness or highness, 2) absolute duration, 3) timbre (even if we cannot sort out specific tone qualities in ensemble playing, the overall impression is inescapably "given"), 4) volume, consonance, dissonance - in jazz these conflicts are accepted more easily, 5) stress - accents, attack, swing, pulse, gentle, stormy or speedy motion at perfectly definite tempo... while in active hearing... [there is a]... 1) logical connectedness of tonal sequence, impression of development, definite expectation, and 2) [there are]... subordinate melodies/indistinct "tuneless" melodies, inner voice movements.

While I would agree that all of the above are definitely elements of the musical experience, I do not see why Langer feels that the division of hearing into active and passive modes is necessary, on the one hand, and that, on the other hand, she does not delve sufficiently deeply into the essential phenomenological experience of musical sounding, how it takes shape in the primordial musical situation. I find fault with the former as it does nothing to erode the traditional thought component/sensuous component that has historically plagued musical aesthetics. The latter objection, however, is of far greater consequence.

Though Langer, certainly more than her peers, gave more weight to the immediate perception of music, rather than its abstract cognition as a symbolic language, she never fully penetrates into the *Logos* of the primordial situation wherein the full *felt significance* of music as a communicative other arises. In *The Experiencing of Musical Sound*, (1979) F. Joseph Smith *first* provides an account of the centrality of what I call the "listening stance" before moving on to a more specifically musical description of the primordial situation. Echoing the findings of Chapter Two, he argues that self-transcendence towards Dasein is not just my worlding of the world, but the opening of the world of discourse where in self and other come together and listen to the *Logos*. As he puts it (1979, p. 37):

...transcendence is "musical": the discourse of the living dialectic between me and you, and this living dialectic is conveyed only by living word as meaningful sound. In his essay on "logos" in *Vortage und Aufsätze*, Heidegger emphasizes the necessity of *listening* to the *Logos*. We cannot hear at all with our ears unless we already harken. An ontological harkening precedes any ontic hearing. Thus, we can hear not just because we have physical ears; rather we have ears because we are already hearers in that we already so listen to the logos, that we can be said to belong (*gehoren*) to logos. Only then can we hear (*horen*) words and sounds. Otherwise we turn a deaf ear, even though the sounds penetrate to us physically. Forgetfulness of ontological being is often simply not harkening to being. Thus the essence of language is not taken just from physical sound. In order to say anything and in order to listen, the recollection or the ingathering of logos is a prerequisite. Thus the *logos mousikos*, which makes any physical sound and hearing possible.

Secondly, Smith argues that listening, hearing, and harkening are so basic to the primordial situation that it is perhaps more correct to speak in terms of *akumena* (things heard) rather than phenomena (things seen). His reasoning (1979, p. 28) is straightforward enough: sight distances things, putting them under our control, while sounds reach inwards and touch our very being. To recognize this, all one need do is acknowledge that, in the dark, vision is of no use to us; it is listening, hearing that guides us through the gloom. In order to come to an understanding of phenomena, then, it is, perhaps not sufficient to simply intuit their *eidos* (looked essence), as



Husserl would say. Since most things possess an acoustical dimension, Smith reasons, the *echos* (sonorous essence) of *akumena*, too, is central to *Logos*. In order to achieve a more comprehensive phenomenology of bodily understanding, the whole human experience of the world as it is lived, then, the phenomenological reduction should aim at revealing both the *eidos* of phenomena and the *echos* of *akumena*. For musical aesthetics, in common with all other totalizing, abstract theoretical pursuits, has nothing to say about pure sound, the music itself that only reveals itself when it is not forced to comply with logically derived, intellectual preconceptions of its import. Simply put, music should be allowed to sing in its infinite modalities; in fact, as modern composers such as John Cage and R. Murray Schafer (1974) have argued, all sounds are material for musical compositions. We should, consequently, attempt to conjure the *echos* of *akumena*, revealed in their carnal resonance, rather than force soundings to cohere within some previously conceived, scholastic schematization of musical meaning. (It should be mentioned, however, that there are far less constricted conceptions of vision as a distancing mechanism than that provided by Smith. As we shall see on page 201, Barry Lopez, for one, offers a far more synaesthetic viewpoint).

In discussing the epiphany in Chapter Two, I employed Levin's analogy of the lightning bolt to elucidate the *ecart*, the moment in which the other reveals itself, emerges out of the darkness of concealment in order to set *ek-static* conversation into motion. It was, therefore, made clear that the notion of contrast is central to capturing the dynamic, dialectic exchange between the transcendent self and the other viewed as, paradoxically, a "being-in-itself-for-us". The obvious musical analogue of the visual chiaroscuro of lightning and darkness is sounding and silence. Where the visual and auditory part company, however, is that the darkness of visual concealment can be more definitely treated as a moment of closedness than can silence, the rest in music. Though both visual and auditory perception unfold by means of temporal Gestalts, it would seem justifiable to claim that, in the case of music, the rhythmic, dynamic nature of contrasting Gestalts is more pronounced. (It should be stated here that, along with Schafer and others, I assume that any sound can be incorporated into a musical soundscape). Hence, silence is not a moment of closedness, but as equally an integral part of the musical experience as the sounding of tones is. As Merleau-Ponty claims (1962, p. 328):

sounds... belong to a sensory field, because sounds once perceived can be followed only by other sounds, or by silence, which is not an auditory nothingness, but the absence of sounds, and which, therefore, keeps us in contact with the being of sound. If, during the process of reflection, I cease to hear sounds, and then suddenly become receptive to them again, they appear to me already there, and I pick up a thread which I had dropped but which is unbroken.

In the case of music, specifically, we are certainly aware that the rest is intentionally employed with the result that we carry the pulse of the piece through the silence in full anticipation of its resolution. The *ecart*, the muting of soundings, then, is grasped in its full gestural significance as a momentary pause, much like taking a breath in speech, which anticipates re-sounding. We are assured that a new Gestalt will emerge, and so, are intensely, palpably aware of the rhythmic nature of the *ek-stase* of time. By extension, we are also made aware of the dynamism of the dialectical relation that we, not just as engaged listeners, but as embodied, transcendent selves, have at all times with communicative others. In short, the musical experience immediately transports us into the primordial situation of invitation and response through its contrasting, rhythmic patterns of tension and resolution, consonance and dissonance, sounding and silence. As I hear it: out of the sonorously diffuse, resonating world, *Logos* harkens; a tone is struck: an invitation; another is struck in reply: a harmony; an interrelation is established, and a communication is set into ek-static motion.

At this juncture, it would seem prudent to clearly delineate the distinction between ek-static/existential time and objective/scientific time. The fundamental difference is that, while the latter is quantitative, views time as the serial unfolding of now-points arranged along a linear scale with absolute mathematical precision, the former views time as a qualitative unfolding of significant "happenings". In ek-static time, there is a relaxation of the traditional Western trichotomy of time into past, present and future in that the present always gathers up the past and projects it into the horizontal future. Phenomenologically, then, time is not an objective, universal truth, an eternity (which, ironically, makes time static), but a constant becoming.

As was noted in Chapter Two, phenomenological, experiential time may be viewed, not as a series of now-points forming a line, but as significant situational encounters which not only exist in the immediate present, but which have been structured in the past as *retentions* and exist as potential structures in the future as *protensions*. This is nowhere more evident than in the case of music, as Husserl noted. Husserl modelled his conception of time on the "protensive" character of a musical melody, extending in sequence from past through present into the future, and leaving a "retensive" trail in memory. Rejecting the mathematical conceptions of music stemming from Greek philosophy, he preferred not to employ objective conceptualizations of time, but to encounter time as it is directly experienced, subjectively, in the temporal sequence of a musical composition as it builds toward musical form in successive moments (Smith, 1979, p. 100). As Smith puts it: "The music is like a comet plummeting through subjective space, leaving a trail of after-echoes, a musical tail (*Zeitschwanz*) that is retained in memory" (1979, p. 101). Memory, though, is not to be taken as an "electronic storehouse for sense data," but as a "form of elemental awareness" (1979, p. 102). Furthermore, the evanescent musical moment is not to be cognized as a discrete, atomistic unit. Rather:

The forward thrust of musical time builds a horizon of expectations and possibilities for the composer and for the listener; and, as the musical tone unfolds in its forward movement of "protension" it leaves in its wake a whole series of tonal shadows (*Abschattungen*), that spread out in ever diminishing diagonal lines behind it (1979, p. 102).

There are some quite interesting corollaries to this phenomenological treatment of time-consciousness which, when spelled out, transcend the difficulties encountered by formalist and expressionist accounts of musical meaning. The first is that, no tone can ever be encountered in isolation as even a single note always occurs as a focal point against retensive and protensive musical structure, horizon. As a building block of musical structure, harmony and melody, a tone always implies a sequence of tones which gradually come together to establish musical meaning. Every tone, therefore, has significance, but only in its interrelation with other tones in the whole. Moreover, "tonally moving forms" as Hanslick might say, unfold in a realm of pure *duration*, not linearly and objectively. That is,

music moves in phenomenological, *virtual* time, time as it appears-in-experience which is by means of sensibilities, tensions and releases, making music solely qualitative, rather than quantitative. ("Virtual", then, is not to be taken in terms of its current bastardization as meaning "fake" or "electronic", but in its true sense as "essential nature" as opposed to "scientific", "formal" or "objective" conceptualization). As Langer states it (1953, pp. 110-111):

It [music] creates an image of time measured by the motion of forms that seem to give it substance that consists entirely of sound, so it is transitoriness itself. Music makes time audible, and its form and continuity sensible... music uses time as an element of its expression; duration is its essence. The beginning and end of a musical composition are only one if the music has possessed itself of the interval between them and wholly filled it.

Music, therefore, might be seen to demand the highest degree of qualitative appreciation, felt significance, since, in order to establish its significance we must immediately experience its dynamic, eventful unfolding in time, while banishing any thought of its being objective or having a conceptual content. As David Rothenberg says (1997, pp. 1-3):

Music is so amazing precisely because we do not need to comprehend it to be moved by it... sound speaks to us yet has nothing exact to tell. The melodies of the world are what they are. Nothing less, nothing more.

It is only in accepting the musical invitation that we can develop any sense of a musical work's import. Tones, then, are neither emotive triggers, nor are they pure particulars that are cognized or re-cognized by a transcendent consciousness. They exist solely in an interrelational perceptual situation unfolding in virtual time. As Smith states it (1979, p.103):

we hear globally, synthetically, not as the mind actively turns toward phenomena conceived in linear terms, but passively as the melody takes shape in audial perception.

What Smith means by "passively" should be clarified. As we recall from Chapter Three, true aesthetic appreciation would seem to occur on some

middle ground which exists as a tension between subjective and objective, expressionist and formalist accounts, of beauty, the sensuous component and the thought component, as Hepburn characterizes it. The perceiving subject, consequently, is made to provide a reasoned, non-trivial, objective account of his positive evaluation of an aesthetic object, yet only up to the point that it does not overwhelm his subjective experience of it. What Smith is claiming, then, is that musical phenomena, *akumena*, seem to be objective insofar as they appear to constitute themselves, come together in and of themselves prior to any mental act or receptivity. They, consequently, seem to be objectively given and that the subject is passive in relation to this synthesis. On pages 109-110, he gives an account of this "passivity":

Musical sounds fall together or *pull themselves together* (*sich zusammenschliessen*) for me in synthetic patterns in the experience of listening to a sonata or to the sonata-allegro movement of a given symphony. I am thus "passive," in that this symphonic happening comes over me, *though I am not overcome* [italics mine].

Though Smith elects not to pursue this theme any further, his claim that he is not overcome may given weight by delving into a quote from Langer cited above. Langer claims that it is often the case that music contains subordinate melodies, indistinct "tuneless" melodies, inner voice movements that are not immediately grasped. Without perusing a score, how could one know this *experientially* if one were not, at times, actively engaged in the working out of subordinate, not immediately focal, inner voicings? Is this not the very reason that we can never exhaust the meaning of a piece of music, defuse its significance? If the work were given fully objectively, and that, therefore, we passively absorbed its entire intention upon its first hearing, why would we continue to listen to it? It would seem clear that the composition is forever seeking an audience, an active participant in the full realization of musical meaning. To paraphrase Aaron Copland (1984), the work always requires a "creative listener." The point is that there must be some subjective organizational activity occurring for the musical experience to be truly appreciative. If the subject were purely passive towards the utterly transcendent other, would it not be possible that the experience would result in the reception of pure cacophony by the subject? Surely, listening involves the contextual engagement of both listening self and musical other in the establishment of musical meaning?

The final point to be gleaned from Smith's phenomenology of musical sound and, thus, of music's *felt significance*, is that musical tones come together to create a new unity, have a synergistic quality much in the same manner as an ecosystem. Smith has this to say about the fusion of tones into a harmony (1979, p. 241):

...musical tones are not merely physically merged, nor are they simply part of some mathematical schema in the mind, when we speak of a musical composition. Rather, tones fuse in the consciousness of the perceiving subject. A musical interval, as e.g. of a fifth, does not consist merely in the concurrence of two tones. Rather, in sounding together they fuse in consciousness into a new entity. Fusion is given primordially in perception itself, so that the sound, e.g., of a fifth, is essentially different than the sound of each of its components singly or merely concurrently.

### **Attuned Comportment**

As we have seen throughout this chapter, we cannot truly proceed to establish the significance and meaning of music without rejecting purely subjective or objective, expressionist or formalist positions in favour of giving an account of how music is immediately perceived in its full ek-static thrust. The central impediment to truly coming to terms with musical meaning is that, though we are all profoundly responsive to music, we are still constricted by the belief that musical aesthetics must be scientific and objective in order to be reasonable and non-trivial. As Susan McClary nicely sums it up:

...it is quite clear to most listeners that music moves them, that they respond deeply to music in a variety of ways, even though in our society they are told that they cannot know anything about music without having absorbed the whole theoretical apparatus necessary for musical specialization. But to learn this apparatus is to learn to renounce one's responses, to discover that the musical phenomenon is to be understood mechanistically, mathematically. Thus non-trained listeners are prevented from talking about social and expressive dimensions of music (for they lack the vocabulary to refer to its parts) and so are trained musicians (for they have been taught,

in learning the proper vocabulary, that music is strictly self-contained structure) (cited in Bogue, 1991, p. 85).

The only seeming recourse to overcoming this objective-scientific bias is, arguably, to foster an appreciation of music which is more in keeping with the immediate encounter with music in perceptual situations, to attend to musical *Logos*. Perhaps, the solution may reside in nurturing what I call "attuned comportment" or what David Michael Levin refers to as "Hearkening." The central theme of Levin's book, *The Listening Self* (1989), is that our hearing is a gift of nature which is "the gift of an *unfulfilled* capacity, an *unrealized* potential, an *unfinished* task" (1989, p. 2) which, ultimately, means that we must foster response-ability. We have ears so that we can listen, as Heidegger would put it. The purpose of his book, then, is to effect a radical change in the way we listen to Being, and, thus, to indicate how we can achieve appropriate worldly comportment. As he states it (1989, p. 5):

...first, we will be considering a diagnosis that brings out our experiential, auditory *closure* to the dimensionality of Being as a whole; then we will initiate a *recollection* of Being in a process through which we make contact with this dimension and retrieve for present living the as yet unrealized potential that lies in our renewed belonging to, and being once again attuned by, the dimensionality, meaning, and wholeness of Being.

The launching point for Levin's argument is that, in the twentieth century, the egoism, patriarchy, the dominance of the masculine gender and character, the instrumentalization of Reason, the domination of nature, the domination of people, and the will to power have resulted in a deeply-ingrained societal narcissism and nihilism symptomatic of a negation of any sense of transcendent meaningfulness, a deafness to the call of Being. The question, then, is whether or not we can re-open ourselves to, recollect, Being through the adoption of the listening stance. His assumption, obviously, is in the affirmative. He argues that:

...our hearing is in fact an *ontological* organ: an organ always already inherent in, belonging to, and attuned by, the openness of the dimensionality of Being as a whole, presencing for our hearing as an auditory field, a sonorous field (1989, p. 16).

Following Heidegger, he identifies objective-scientific thought, even metaphysics, as the source of our alienation from Being, and our attendant narcissism and nihilism. In order to overcome these tendencies, then, we must cease to totalize and reify Being, the "real presence." And to this end, we must first draw the distinction between wholeness and totality (wholeness is a sound, organic, mutuality between the roles of beings within an entirety, while a totality is both absolutely inclusive and absolutely exclusive, in a quite real sense), otherwise we will not appreciate the non-totalizable wholeness of presence. We must come to an understand of how Being *is* (the way Being manifests, appears, shows itself):

...for a thinker [to be] able to relate to "it", able to be with "it", in a non-grasping, non-enframing, non-representational way, i.e. neither relating to it instrumentally nor relating to it theoretically, according to the methods of speculative metaphysics (1989, p. 26).

How, then, could this be achieved? In his previous book, *The Opening of Vision* (1988), Levin contended that our reliance on vision, or more exactly, the gaze, must be overcome as it is the most totalizing and reifying of the senses. Since scientific-objective thought assumes the absolute intelligibility and transparency of the world, its ontology, its paradigm of knowledge and truth is vision. "Seeing is believing", or as my father would say, "believing is seeing" (Livingston, 1994, p. 70). The latter is a particularly good phrase as it underscores that vision is, by no means neutral or objective and that there is simply no form of knowledge that is disinterested. Levin identifies two types of Gaze:

...the one practical and aggressively active, the other theoretical and contemplative, panoramic, stationary, unmoved, dispassionate, disembodied outside time and space... The capacity of the gaze to *turn away* from the entities it has seen and yet retain an image of them in isolation, abstracted from their situational assignments, i.e. as present-at-hand, as *vorhanden*, enables and encourages our vision to assume a theoretical power that in turn amplifies its practical power over entities (1989 p. 30).

Hence, we have resourcism, rather than compliance, interrelation, reciprocity, care and concern, any sense of belonging with others. And as



long as we rely solely on vision as the ground of our metaphysical speculating, we will forever be spectators, not participants.

Hearing, however, lacks these ontological and epistemological evils. The very transitoriness of sound "never lets us forget impermanence and never allows us a total grasp and possession" of it (Levin, 1989, p. 28). As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, when we are in the dark, we are, really and truly faced with the concealment, closure of Being; hence, it is easy to be forgetful of Being. Moreover, we can open and close our eyes at will, so we can effectively shut ourselves off from, remain untouched and unmoved by, Being whenever we choose. This, however, does not obtain for hearing since sounds always penetrate our egological boundaries. As Levin says (1989, p. 32):

Hearing is intimate, participatory, communicative; we are always *affected* by what we are given to hear. Vision, by contrast, is endistancing, detached, spatially separate from what gives itself to be seen.

Sound possesses a very unique ontological status: it exists somewhere between a thing and nothing. It is something, yet we cannot bring it fully under our control; but neither it is a no-thing as it is resolutely *there* as a palpable resonance. Though immaterial, sound does "ring true." And in that it has this mediating character, enjoys a middle ground between thing and no-thing, Levin suggests that, perhaps, it might fulfil a role in:

...balancing and integrating the metaphysical privileging of focus over diffusion and dissemination, centre over periphery, figure over ground, object over context, substance over process. 'Overcoming metaphysics' means ending its privileging of permanence over perishing, totality over whole, and cognitive control over letting-be; it means changing our epistemological and ontological commitments (1989, p. 44).

Levin's attempt to develop response-ability, the listening self involves four stages of self-development. The *first* stage describes what I have been referring to as the prepersonal, preontological realm which we acquire in infancy. It may be characterized as a fundamental openness to the sum total of sonorous energy which we are immersed in, belong to, and are attuned by. At this level, there is very little figure-ground articulation, and little

differentiation of "the positional being of the listener from the encompassing being (the sonorous topology of Being) as a whole" (1989, p. 45). And since there is as yet no distinction between self and other, subject and object, no fixed ego-logical boundaries, hearing may be deemed to be global, holistic, and ek-static. It might be said that our hearing, then, is still that of a biological, ecological being which belongs. Unfortunately, however:

In this process of socialization, we inevitably lose touch with this pre-ontological relationship to and understanding of, Being; and as we mature, the utterly open dimensionality of our hearing is increasingly repressed - sometimes getting psychotically split off. This 'renunciation' of our primordial ecstasy is in fact a *necessary* condition for the further development of our auditory capacity. What is unfortunate is not its *Aufhebung*, its sublimation, in stage II, but our continued abandonment of Being, and our unwillingness to retrieve it, later in life, in the time of our maturity (1989, p. 46).

Clearly, then, the *second* stage, which we acquire somewhere between about the age of one and adolescence involves, first, the imitation of sounds heard, culminating in speech and a sense of individuality, selfhood. The subject/object dichotomy is firmly in place, and what "normally" would be part of the developmental process - Gestalt structuring - perverted by the "wilful and oppositional" (1989, p. 47) nature of our present historical situation, becomes *Gestell*, enframing, which successfully obliterates the ontological dimensionality of the auditory field.

In adulthood, we have reached the *third* stage wherein we must take responsibility for our hearing. Beyond the normal constraints of socialization, we are "committed to further training, a practice of self-discipline" (1989, p. 47). It is at this stage that we are faced with what I referred to earlier, in Chapter Two as a choice between the invitational hand or the gauntlet: we can perpetuate adolescence or we can attempt to develop beyond the ego-logical and attempt Naess' Self-realization!. Levin argues that the distinction between the ego and the self is crucial for maturity (1989, pp. 47-48):

Whereas the ego is a defensively adaptive structure identified with an essentially fixed, socially conforming content, the identity which begins to form in the work of stage III, the way of living I am calling

the 'Self', is an ongoing process of self-development, a structure of individuation creatively open to change, a structure organized by, and identified with, processes that *carry forward* learning and growth... we are essentially involved in developing our listening as a practice of compassion, increasing our capacity, as listeners, to be aware of, and responsive to, the interrelatedness and commonality of all sonorous beings. (Although distinct from this compassion practice, the development of hearing as an aesthetic skill both contributes to, and is in turn advanced by, the development of hearing as an organ of compassion. For the aesthetic is precisely the cultivation of sensibility, a deepening of our capacity for sensuous and affective appreciation.)

It is at the *fourth* stage that we have the capacity for "attuned comportment" or "hearkening" which Levin lauds as a *spiritual* accomplishment. In very Heideggerian terms, he describes what the fourth stage should strive to realize:

Hearkening requires the disciplined practice of *Gelassenheit*, i.e. letting-go and letting-be, as a mode or style of listening. In learning *Gelassenheit*, the art of 'just listening', listening without getting entangled in the ego's stories and preoccupations, one learns a different way of channelling, focusing, attending. There is a restructuring of the figure-ground difference, with an awareness that it manifests the appropriation of the auditory field by the double tonality of the *ontological* difference. Hearkening makes, or lets, this ontological difference - the difference between beings and Being [between the ontic and the ontological as we saw in Chapter Two] - be manifest, be audible, within the *Gestalt* of the auditory situation (1989, p. 48).

As we recall, the ontological difference is, basically, a difference that makes a difference. In everyday thinking and speech, our preoccupation is with the ontic: all the individual entities that we encounter and deal with. With a shift to the ontological, however, we discover a world of significance, an embracing, participatory world, a communicative other: Being. I can think of no example that is simpler than, nor superior to, R.D. Laing's encapsulation (1968, pp. 35-36):

'The sky is blue' suggests that there is a substantive 'sky' that is 'blue'. This sequence of subject verb object, in which 'is' acts as a copula uniting sky and blue, is a nexus of sounds, and syntax, signs and symbols, in which we are fairly completely entangled and which separates us from at the same time as it refers us to that ineffable sky-blue-sky. The sky is blue is *not* sky, sky is not blue. But in saying 'the sky is blue' we say 'the sky' 'is'. The sky exists and it is blue. 'Is' serves to unite everything and at the same time 'is' is not any of the things that it unites.

None of things that are united by 'is' can themselves qualify 'is'. 'Is' is not this, that, or the next, or anything. Yet 'is' is the condition of the possibility of all things. 'Is' is that no-thing whereby all things are.

'Is' as no-thing, is that whereby all things are. And the condition of the possibility of anything being at all, is that it is in relation to that which it is not.

That is to say, the ground of the being of all beings is the relation between them. This relationship is the 'is', the being of all things, and the being of all things is itself no-thing. Man creates in transcending himself in revealing himself. But what creates, wherefrom and whereto, the clay, the pot and the potter, are all not-me. I am the witness, the medium, the occasion of a happening that the created thing makes evident.

Man, most fundamentally, is not engaged in the discovery of what is there, nor in production, nor even in communication, nor in invention. He is enabling being to emerge from nonbeing.

In short, the ontological difference may be interpreted as the *Logos* of the primordial situation which weds ontic beings, by initiating the conversation in which ontological Being emerges. In letting other beings go, be, in hearkening to the rhythm of sonorous Being, we not only become attuned to the ontological difference, but become true worldly participants. Upon accepting the invitation from engaging other, the embodied self, the ek-static movement of the dialectical ontological discourse, is set free into dynamic motion.

As a disciplined practice, stage four involves the attempt to recapture what Freud referred to as the "oceanic feeling" (1961, p. 20), the pre-ontological relationship and understanding of our earliest infancy wherein there were no dichotomies, no polarization of self and other, subject and

object. It is to reclaim the basic experience of Being that we had prior to its perversion through the process of socialization and the erection of defensive ego-logical boundaries. Clearly though, for adults, the attempt to meaningfully rediscover the dimensionality of sonorous Being is thoroughly conscious, thoughtful, and articulate; it is Naess' Self-realization!. Unlike stage two:

...[where] the auditory *Gestalt* is enframing, is a *Gestell*, here the structure becomes a gathering of sonorous Being: a *gathering* mindful of its utterly open dimensionality, attentive to the primordial difference by grace of which all auditory structures are possible, and respectful of the incommensurability of the Being of sonorous beings, letting the inaudible be audible (Levin, 1989, p. 49).

Levin, however issues a caveat: the development from the first to the fourth stage is not to be taken as a straightforwardly linear process. That is, in the evolution of the Self, there is never a complete transcendence or transformation of the preceding stage. As there is change, then, so is there preservation. Each stage remains as a sedimented existential structure even though it may seemingly have been transcended, "overcome". Consequently, socialization and the development of the ego never erase the vestiges of belonging stemming from our infancy. We can, therefore, through conscious exertion, retrieve the primordial experience of the dimensionality of resonant Being. The recollection of being is:

...a *hermeneutical* movement: we must first 'go back' to *Zugehörigkeit* [the first stage], 'back', as it were, to 'the beginning', in order to develop beyond the ego-logical stage of ontological forgetfulness in listening. Or rather, to state this point more accurately, since in truth this 'beginning', this 'origin', can never be retrieved *now* as it actually was *then*, we must first generate within ourselves a *presently felt sense* of our 'pre-ontological beginning'. This movement forward, this growth, requires a hermeneutical movement backward: a movement, however, that must not be confused with an infantile or psychotic regression. It is essential to understand the difference between this hermeneutical 'return' and a pathological regression. Regression is a movement in one direction only; it *repeats* what came earlier instead of redeeming it; and it is

always a movement, therefore, that *closes* the process of personal growth (Levin, 1989, pp. 55-56).

The Self that both Levin and Naess, taken together, suggest one seek is a Self that *realizes* itself as constantly moving forward through a dual movement of identification with other selves, conceived as processes, and a hermeneutical return to, and retrieval of, one's primordial experience of resonant, carnal Being as an embracing and communicative totality which presences itself through the ek-static movement of time. To *fulfil* our capacity, *realize* our potential, and *complete* our task of becoming true *listening* selves we must *recollect* our gift of nature: *hearing*. To develop *answer-ability*, *response-ability*, *at-tuned* worldly comportment, Levin claims, one of the central tasks is to foster a sense of Self that is non-patriarchal, and more in keeping in with the conception of Self developed in feminist critique. As he characterizes the different conceptions of the Self, the patriarchal tradition embraces a conception of "Self", stemming from Cartesian metaphysics, which is:

(1) disembodied, (2) self-contained, (3) monadic, i.e. essentially isolated and self-contained, (4) essentially and ideally purely cognitive, purely intellectual, (5) identified with its inner states and their 'contents', and (6) defined in structural, i.e. static, terms. By contrast, the Self toward which the feminist critique is pointing is (1) essentially embodied, (2) contextually situated, (3) relational and interactional from the very beginning, (4) essentially affective, motivational, libidinal, and aesthetic, (5) identified to a large extent with the character of its relationships, and (6) defined in terms of process, that is to say, essentially in terms of the dynamics of change and growth (1989, p. 222).

Ultimately, then, for Levin, the task is to overcome Cartesian metaphysics, and recollect Being which is set free in the very act of returning to it. One must bear in mind, however, that Being will withdraw if there is any attempt to totalize, cognize or re-cognize it. The recollection of Being, beginning with self-disciplined listening, though a transcendence of forgetfulness, is not aimed at something that is already present; rather, the experience constructs itself through our acknowledgement of Being's opacity and transcendence, through the process of our "letting go, letting be" in the primordial situational encounter. To force Being into any sort of conceptual,

intellectual schema, to form a representation of its essence, or to inauthentically attempt some sort of historical revision of the originating moment of engagement and reciprocity is to foreclose the possibility of encounter and disclosure. Being is not something to which we may neutrally affix "correct" concepts. As Levin says (1989, p. 244):

Before it can be a question of correctness, something must be, must appear, must disclose itself, must sound forth. But this unconcealment of beings can happen only when, and only where, there is a hermeneutical opening, a clearing silence, a field of tonality laid out for the disclosure. This essentially prior event of openness and clearing, of ontological difference, is the primordial moment of truth, the hermeneutical *aletheia* without which there can be no experience of truth in the sense of 'correctness' or 'correspondence'. Before we can *hear* the truth, we must be *open* to listening.

Though in total agreement with Levin's position, I believe that it can be strengthened by attempting to particularize, concretize, the listening stance, attuned comportment, by reference to the way in which we perceive music, i.e. the way that we "hearken" to music that makes it meaningful and significant. In a most interesting article, entitled "Rhizomusicosmology" (1991), Ronald Bogue describes how the musicosmological ruminations of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari are represented in the works of the French composer, Olivier Messiaen. Purposefully eschewing the language of musical aesthetics and cognition, Deleuze and Guattari centre on the complex rhythms and melodic-harmonic structures of Messiaen's music, which were profoundly influenced by natural sound, particularly bird song; in effect to create a new vocabulary for musical analysis that would treat "music as an open structure that permeates and is permeated by world" (Bogue, 1991, p. 85). It is well known that Pythagoras, through Plato explicitly and St. Thomas Aquinas implicitly, severed the link between music and its engaging, felt presence by insisting that music is a self-contained *totality* possessing form, order, proportion and radiance to the exclusion of its more invitational, holistic, and sensuous significance. In limiting "good" or "true" music to its self-contained arithmetical and geometrical properties, and ranking its harmony as greatly inferior to the harmony of an ideal of societal behaviour, they established the ontological and moral "ladder of perfection". Music was a threat to appropriate deportment as it might just be a little too distracting for

the plebeians (Grube, 1974, pp. 90, and 150). The successful realization of their allotted societal duties might be unduly derailed by listening to music. To this end, Plato (in reference more to poetry than music, though he held both in contempt) declared that he would:

...tolerate no resonance, no play of sound, no ambiguity, no shades of meaning, no hints and forebodings, no movement of sense or sound, no polyphonic perversity, no polyphonic or symphonic subversiveness, no anarchy of sounds, no indeterminate though determinable complexity, no ungraspable richness and dimensionality. Plato, who disliked shadows and adumbrations, and wanted them excluded, along with images, from his utopian republic, also recommended very strict control over musical modes and registers. Unlike the discourse of poetizing, the discourse of assertion, propositions and statements must be a discourse of univocity, without any surprising or unregulated fluctuations in sound (Levin, 1988, p. 435).

Against the Greek tradition, then, Deleuze and Guattari reject such a delimited and determinate view of music: music is not a vehicle for leading listeners to subversive acts of moral turpitude, away from the path of virtue. Rather, it is profoundly uplifting for its very openendedness, for its very nuances and adumbrations; music "is not a circumscribed totality but an open whole, whose dimensions can never be given as such" (Bogue, 1991, p. 87). In its cosmological, transcendent nature lies its true import. What, exactly however, does this mean and what are its implications for a redefinition of musical meaning?

Deleuze and Guattari describe music as "the active, creative operation which consists of deterritorializing the refrain" (1980, p. 369). The *refrain* is, to simplify their complex argumentation, a "rhythmic pattern that stakes out a *territory*". The process may be interpreted, *first*, as a means to establishing a point of stability, a point of reference amidst "chaos"; or, *secondly*, it may be a demarcation of possession: for example, a cat spraying; or, *thirdly*, it may be an opening to other territories or the cosmos at large: for example, a bird making contact with other beings and Being itself through its improvised vocalizations at dawn. Hence, the three aspects of territory that the refrain delineates: "a point of stability, a circle of property, and an opening to the outside" (Bogue, 1991, p. 88).



The territory, then, is a rhythmic boundary, created out of "chaos", and periodically repeated to ensure continued contact between beings or between beings and Being. Consequently, it has both an ontical and ontological dimensionality. Thus, rhythm is to be understood both as establishing difference or relation, the "in-between whereby milieus communicate with one other" (Bogue, 1991, p. 88); and, since it cannot be mathematically quantified, but rather is qualitative and virtual/existential, something which *hearkens*, it is something that anticipates resolution through the renewal of contact and communion. The "in-between", the situational contact established by the communion of self and other in the primordial situation, is the *Logos* of music which has as its essence "rhythm in its broadest sense, that is, anticipated recurrence. Rhythm creates an atmosphere, a mood, that has potential for renewal, but in a fully open-ended manner" (Hall, 1968, p. 106). Ultimately, because rhythm cannot be measured and predicted, it is not a mere repetition of pulses of precise repetition, but the means by which one Gestalt merges with another through the ek-static movement of time, which blends territories and emphasizes their qualitative differences.

In espousing a *theoretical* reclamation of musical meaning, though, Deleuze and Guattari still need to demonstrate that their ontological and epistemological, ultimately metaphysical, speculations can be given credence; hence the need for a particular compositional approach which justifies and exemplifies their position: the works of Olivier Messiaen.

Messiaen's compositions are so appealing to Deleuze and Guattari because, in common with all great composers, he intentionally breaks free from traditional expectations of musical propriety through his rhythmic, harmonic and melodic innovations.

Deleuze and Guattari employ the analogy of a rhizome (as opposed to a tree) to describe his music. This is a thoroughly appropriate metaphor as it both elucidates their philosophical endeavour and acknowledges Messiaen's great love of, and the inspiration he received from, the natural world, especially in its soundings. A tree stands vertically and immobile, save for its continual branching; a rhizome, however, moves horizontally, insinuating its way towards an environment, a milieu, where it may develop and flourish. The image is particularly convincing as it mirrors

musical notation: a chord is like a tree in that it provides a structural orientation, avails itself of a sedimented structure, and is vertically represented as such on a staff; a melody, though, is, like a rhizome in that, in the melody's visual representation in a score, it moves sinuously across bar lines, territories, so to speak, as it seeks a favourable environment, an appropriate musical context, just as a rhizome weaves between trees in its appropriate ecological context.

What ultimately grounds the music, though, is the rhythm that conjoins harmonic structures and melodic innovations. Rhythm establishes expectation: we are listening, through our embodiment, our electrified participation, for some resolution. It is very easy to seek and understand the resolution which occurs in a Strauss waltz, as it is straightforwardly, predictably, in 3/4 time. But what can one make of the final movement of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*? The time signature shifts continually, thwarting our expectations. The temporal designations of 3/16, 2/16, 5/16, 2/8, 3/8, 4/8 which open "*Sacrificial Dance (The Chosen One)*" (1947, p. 67ff) lend a very disjointed and disturbing movement to the music which entirely thwarts any attempt to predict or anticipate its resolution. Moreover, as if the rhythm itself is not sufficient to disorient, there is also the matter of the "illegal" superimposition of inamicable chordal structures, and the use of exotic eastern modes, rather than the musical scales central to Western diatonic harmony. In 1917, listeners steeped in the niceties of the classical musical tradition must have been appalled by Stravinsky's musical "perversions". It is no wonder that riots ensued from the work's premiere: it would have shaken people to their quivers to have to defend themselves against this seemingly gratuitous and monstrous assault upon their musical sensibilities.

To understand the rhizome metaphor is to come to terms with many of the concepts lying at the heart of Messiaen's sense of musical meaning. One is that Messiaen's music unfolds in ek-static time as it is experienced through moments of pure duration that hermeneutically retrieve retentions and thrust them into the future as protensions. Janus-faced, moving circularly, his music seemingly has no purpose or direction, as his many critics have noted. Strictly avoiding arithmetical time, Messiaen's intention is:

...to engage the incommensurable rhythms of the cosmos, whose varying time-scales range from the infinitesimal vibration of atoms to the endless movement of the stars. His object, in short, is to articulate a "timeless time" - ametrical, nonteleological, reversible and unlimited... which has neither beginning nor end, neither origin nor destination; it is always in the middle. It is not made of points, but only of lines. It is a rhizome (Bogue, 1991, p. 95).

### **Conclusion: Creative Expression and Ontological Discourse**

In the course of researching this dissertation, I have been struck by the number of authors representing seemingly disparate academic positions who have shown a convergence of opinion on the matter of the "middle-ground": a situational encounter between an invitational, engaging other and an embodied self that forges meaning, that weds the ontic and ontological, beings and Being. That an invitational hand is extended and warmly clasped seems to be ontologically and epistemologically central to any exchange, conversational, artistic or musical, wherein a meaningful synergism is achieved, concretized and projected into an anticipated future: an improvisational retrieval and renewal of communion which is at once aesthetic *and* ethical. The self-involved monologue is wilfully indifferent to the true significance of dialectical exchange with all of its metalinguistic gestural nuances. The scientific obsession with totalizing, providing an objectively irrefutable theory, precludes the possibility of eventful, reciprocally meaningful encounters. This appears to be the conclusion of any historian, aesthetician, psychologist, or musicologist who attempts the phenomenological reduction. Truth and appropriate behavior are not simply a matter of reaching a convincing theoretical end-point, a tree fulfilling its function in a "climax" community. What we should strive for is to assume the nature of its roots, tendrils, as they tentatively seek a new environment, a milieu in which the decaying thing or concept may achieve rebirth. Everything, live or abstract, requires its setting in order to grow and blossom.

As we have seen, the ek-static movement of time forces us, as sincere, embodied interlocutors with engaging others, to continually move forward, to become truly transpersonal beings through the attempt to improvisationally forge the meaning of any concrete situation. Yet, this is true not just of conversation, but of any moment of meaningful exchange.

Hence, though music is fundamentally ineffable, this is not to say that the intention of the composer brings all truth to the moment of musical epiphany. The audience, the attuned, listening self must respond responsibly for true hearkening to be achieved. There must be a commitment to reciprocity between mutually trusting selves and other beings.

In the concert hall there is no place for egos: neither virtuosos, nor the false enthusiasts, snobs, who only attend a performance so they may applaud the great conductor. We must hear music, in fact encounter any soundscape in the full realization that we are being afforded a tremendous opportunity for insight and existential communion. We are not to be daunted by the fact that we may lack the appropriate technical vocabulary. The artist needs his audience for the fulfilment of his communication. As Stravinsky has written:

A work of art cannot contain itself. Once the creator has completed his work, he necessarily feels the need to share his joy. He quite naturally seeks to establish contact with his fellow man, who in this case becomes his listener. The listener reacts and becomes a partner in the game initiated by the creator. Nothing less, nothing more. The fact that the partner is free to accept or refuse participation in the game does not automatically invest him with the authority of a judge... [but if response-ability is seriously entertained by an audience] the listener's task becomes especially harrowing when a first hearing is concerned; for the listener in this case has no point of reference and possesses no basis for comparison. And so it comes about that the first impression, the first contact with the new-born work with the public, is completely dependent upon the validity of a presentation that eludes all controls (1942, p.137-139).

Herein lies the moral gauntlet in its musical form. If we are to be truly responsible, we must hear music in its opacity and transcendence, must hearken to the invitational profferment of an experiential gift that is tendered in an atmosphere of complete trust. It is only then that we can begin to continually develop our potential for Self-realization! through ongoing dialogue. To truly "become" we must always both recollect, hermeneutically retrieve these moments of initial contact, and improvisationally project them towards a meaningful horizon, a future

grounded by the anticipation of renewal and rejuvenation. We no more have meaning as isolated egos than tones have significance in isolation. Reciprocity and community are always there as long as we can feel significance, achieve true worldly at-tuned comportment and selflessly maintain open-ended trust and communion in a thoroughly selfless intertwining of interests, cares and concerns, curiosity and wonder.

## 5 PHENOMENOLOGY, MUSIC, NATURE

In the foregoing chapters, I have explored the possibility of developing a more appropriate, appreciative attitude towards the non-human world than the one that has promoted its resourcist commodification. In Chapter One, it was argued that the reification of living beings, the culturally ingrained imperative to treat them as nothing more than objects with extrinsic, utilitarian value, is offensive on the grounds that such a stance is *ecologically* unsound, *ethically* objectionable and *ontologically* deceitful. The question then posed was how a position seemingly so at odds with our direct experience of being-in-the-world could have arisen. Cartesian metaphysics was identified as the culprit, not for the reason that it instituted such conceptual alienation, but that through its systemization of mind/body, subject/object dichotomies that have been around since Plato, it concretized a view of the world wherein disembodied, alienated subjects inhabit a neutral, value-free realm seemingly replete with discrete objects to be manipulated and controlled. Defined solely in scientific/objective terms, and thereby destined to serve the aggrandizement of the human purpose, worldly beings/subjects were transformed into mere things in the blink of an eye.

Arguing that such an arrogant attitude and philosophical position is indefensible, I sought an alternative mode of argumentation that would reflect a more compliant and reciprocal sense of the human/non-human relationship. I found it in the works of Arne Naess and Warwick Fox. Central to Fox's Transpersonal Ecology is Naess' ideal of appropriate environmental conduct, Self-realization!:

the this-worldly realization of expansive a sense of self as possible in a world in which selves and things-in-the-world are conceived as processes...[and] involves the realization of a sense of self that extends beyond [or that is trans-] one's egoic, biographical, or personal sense of self...(Fox, 1990, p.197).

The process-based ontology and epistemology outlined by Naess and Fox offers an agreeable alternative to Cartesian metaphysics. For, while objective science is steadfastly quantitative, transpersonal ecology is thoroughly grounded in the qualitative experience of the world. Nonetheless, I contended that Transpersonal Ecology might be given an additional

philosophical dimension through the exploration of its fundamental agreement with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. In Chapters Two through Four, consequently, I maintained that the phenomenological description of the meaning and significance of encounters between selves and beings-in-the-world, especially as they are revealed in linguistic utterance and musical sounding, nicely mesh with, and exemplify, the ideals of the transpersonal process of Self-realization! It is the purpose of this concluding chapter to hermeneutically retrieve some of those themes in order to improvize upon them in the context of our direct situational encounter with nature. In short, my aim is to recollect and revitalize our transpersonal belongingness.

Throughout, I have maintained that there is an analogy between the perception of music and the perception of nature, and that we positively evaluate them in a similar, perhaps even identical manner. I have not, however, sufficiently elucidated what is meant by the slippery notion of "value". For heuristic reasons at the moment, I will propose that value works as a mnemonic talisman that, though abstract, reacquaints us with moments of significant encounter with others and, thus, the *Logos* of the primordial situation. It is a means, in other words, of recollecting the initial appreciation of contact and communion with Being.

In Chapter Three, I explored the relationship that exists between natural and art objects, and their beauty and appreciation. It is to this theme that I now return. Two authors in particular, Allen Carlson and Arnold Berleant, seem to provide an appropriate anchor for a more detailed discussion of the appreciation and value of the aesthetic experience of nature. I select these two as I find that, though their ruminations would appear to represent radically polarized positions, the former embracing a "thought-component" theory and the latter a "sensuous-component" theory, they may be seen to hold quite similar views on a phenomenological level. To recall Carlson, he believes that it is necessary for a perceiver to assume an - at least partially - disinterested standpoint, to possess a frame of reference in the guise of some relevant information about his aesthetic object in order for his experience to be non-trivial, and therefore truly appreciative. For Carlson, then, the aesthetic appreciation of natural objects is predicated on the perceiver's having a familiarity with the basics of evolutionary and ecological theory. He does, however, carefully delimit the role which such knowledge should play in the determination of appreciation: 1) it does not *weaken or destroy* aesthetic attention to the object - i.e. does not fixate the object and stagnate

the eventful quality of the aesthetic encounter in order to make it conform to some preconceived theory; 2) it is *faithful* to the object's own meaning and expressiveness, is respectful of its "otherness"; and 3) it *enhances* the quality and significance of one's immediate aesthetic response to the object (1995, p. 203).

Berleant says much the same thing, but in his own mode of expression. I do not know if it is his intention, but his aesthetic theorizing seems to call for a phenomenological reduction in that his central concern is somatic engagement. To distill his argument, three elements are essential for aesthetic perception: 1) there must be a *continuity* to the experience; 2) there must be assimilation, a *perceptual integration* which fully allows for the transcendence of the appreciated "object"; and 3) the experience must be both challenging and *participatory*.

To my mind, the theories of Carlson and Berleant are compatible: both stress that there must be an acknowledgment of the "otherness" of what is perceived which may be achieved by means of the recollection of the self's capacity to at-tune, to be answerable; it is a matter of responsibly hearkening to the call of response-ability. With the appropriate attitude, the self can reach out and discover a world of significance, and a sense of place. These are the conditions under which environmentally appropriate valuation can take place.

Such valuation is a singular, immediate, and specific act; it has nothing to do with totalization and generalization through the activity of a distanced Cartesian ego. This fact appears to be lost on some people in the field of environmental management: for example, practitioners of Environmental Impact Assessment. Nowhere can one locate a more definitive source of ecological insensitivity and aesthetic hubris. In *Combining Facts and Values in Environmental Impact Assessment* (1988), the authors attempt to provide an exhaustive compilation of the elements which people seek in natural settings and which, therefore, should guide the preservation of natural communities. Hence it is explicitly reasoned that popular conceptions of the value of natural communities - often couched in the form of shallow, aesthetically trivial expectations - should be given more weight in the selection of an area for protection than informed ecological knowledge. The end result is that the interests of ecologically important species, species that are integral to the healthy functioning of their ecosystem, such as alligators



or scarab beetles, tend to be marginalized in the selection process because they are "hideous": they bask in mud or make their living forming spheres out of faeces. The resourcist view which quantifies and ranks all of nature in terms of its potential as aesthetic spectacle should be immediately apparent in the following itemization of preferred natural environments. There must be (1988, p. 118):

- 1) Presence of water unless grossly polluted
- 2) Dominance of undisturbed land forms and contrast
- 3) Uniformity of scale and character between near, intermediate, and distant zones
- 4) Distinct area of forest cover
- 5) Framing elements of composed or panoramic quality
- 6) Diversity of land use
- 7) Integration of buildings and other man-made elements
- 8) Absence of incongruities or distracting elements
- 9) Presence of flowers
- 10) Varied or rolling topography
- 11) Clean air and high visibility

Save for point ten, this is a suburban shopping mall. This is the gauge by which we are to decide the fate of every other species on the planet? It does not stop here. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has a "Visual Assessment Procedure" which can even more precisely determine our response to things non-human (1988, pp. 123-124):

- 1) Selection of viewpoints to represent typical viewer location, viewer activities and expectations, and potential project visibility;
- 2) Selection of the analysts;
- 3) Collection of data;
- 4) Inventory of water (resources, movement, and scale), landform type, vegetation (cover, diversity, and seasonal change), land and water uses (intensity and type, access type, user activity (degree and frequency) [parentheses *sic*], amount of pollution and litter, similarity of adjacent scenery, sounds (presence and type), smells (presence and type), and visibility (amount and position);
- 5) Forecast of without plan conditions;
- 6) Forecast of with plan conditions;
- 7) Identification of effects;

- 8) Professional assessment of the magnitude and significance of impacts;
- 9) Public assessment of the magnitude and significance of impacts;
- 10) Reconciliation of the professional and public assessment to appraise the net impacts.

It is comforting to know that our tastes are so assiduously maintained and managed.

At this juncture, I would like to introduce a schema for penetrating the recalcitrant shell of our perception of beauty and significance in a natural setting. Deceptively simple, it looks like this:

A                      B                      C                      D                      E

Point A represents complete subjectivity, while point E represents complete objectivity. The aesthetic position occupied by point A is what I would designate as that of a tourist. Told where and when to look and listen by a travel brochure, the tourist leaps out of the car and takes the mandatory snapshot of the partner facing the camera, not the spectacle itself. The experience is essentially *mute* as no acknowledgement of the potential significance of the experience through encounter is pursued. Position E is that of the Environmental Impact Assessment. Everything of salience in the landscape is identified, and correctly quantified; it is the source of the measured spectacle enjoyed by the inhabitants of position A. As experience, it is totalizing, theoretical and steadfastly value-neutral. There is no room for the unnecessary impediment of enjoyment and belonging. Position E is *stentorian*. It is informational, rather than engaging and invitational. If the view associated with position A, in its utter passivity, may be deemed infantile, the E position is that of full "maturity"- available solely through the complete codification of environmental value. What might be inchoate interest is thus eclipsed by the tyranny of the ultimate explanation of the spectacle and the exhaustion of its moral and aesthetic dimensionality.

Position C, however, is grey. It is neither wholly subjective or objective. It is the middle-ground, the *Logos* that situates and balances subjective and objective viewpoints. It is the position of Carlson and Berleant together. Positions B and D are similar in that both are attracted to the middle-ground, C. Where they differ is in the weight they give, respectively, to

objective and subjective bias. Position B I would associate with Aldo Leopold. Though he tables the aesthetic view of nature as a potential source of moral behaviour, his ethical theorizing reflects the period when he was writing. His views partake of too much subjectivity to have much intellectual merit.

Position D, although very similar to Position B, is a little more ecologically informed, less trivial. It moves towards C as a somewhat, but not fully objective, "storied" encapsulation of the dynamic meeting/agreement of "self" and "others". I believe that J. Baird Callicott (1983) represents this viewpoint. With many years of subsequent ecological theorizing and of improvisation on the meaning of place and belonging since Leopold, Callicott can understand the working of an ecosystem while maintaining a clear perspective on the nuisance of mosquitoes, black flies and deer flies. He understands why they are there, what their ecological functioning is. He is a true participant, not just an observer. Though I hold Callicott's thinking in high regard, I cannot place myself with him in Position D for the reason that it is just a little too objective and non-phenomenological for my taste. Like Hepburn and Carlson, I believe that ecological knowledge is relevant for appreciation, yet it should never overwhelm the direct experience of phenomena themselves and must always enhance appreciation, rather than distract or detract from it. I find Position C to be the most agreeable, then, as it offers a distinct balance between disinterest in the present situation and its wholesale appropriation. As Berleant suggested earlier, there must always be: 1) *continuity* to the experience (no attempt at reification, isolating beings as discrete, atomistic units with fixed essences); 2) *perceptual integration* of the experience into one rhythmically shifting yet continuous process of inter-relation; and 3) *participation*, a firm commitment to the acknowledgement of qualitative place and belonging. This is Position C.

### **Ecological Knowledge: The Concepts of Niche and Territory**

This brings us to the notion of what ecological *functioning* is. Do non-humans fulfil a fully determinate, mechanistic/reductionistic role that is easy to encapsulate as function? Is the idea of function merely a matter of human conceptualization, or does it describe something that actually exists? Are there really territories that non-humans claim as their property through song or spray? Or might our ecological story-telling be just a fanciful

projection? Barry Lopez, for one, believes that we must bracket theoretical impositions on Nature; "to gain intimacy" we must rid ourselves of "assumption" (1996, p. 12). As he suggests (1996, pp. 11-12):

Put aside the bird book, an analytic frame of mind, and compulsion to identify, and sit still. Concentrate instead on *feeling* a place, on using the sense of proprioception. Where in this volume of space are you situated? What is spread out behind you is as important as what you see before you. What lies beneath you is as relevant as what stands on the horizon. Actively use your ears to imagine the acoustical space you occupy. How does birdsong ramify here? Through what air is it moving? Concentrate on smells in the belief that you *can* smell water and stone. Use your hands to get the heft and texture of a place - the tensile strength in a willow branch, the moisture in a pinch of soil, the different nap of leaves. Open the vertical line of this place by consciously referring the color and form of sky to what you see across the ground. Look *away* from what you want to scrutinize to gain a sense of its scale and proportion. Be wary of any explanation for the existence of color, a movement. Cultivate a sense of complexity, the sense that another landscape exists beyond the one you can subject to analysis.

Though sympathetic to Lopez's view, I would argue that any non-trivial story-telling in an environmental context can enhance appreciation. I believe in heterogeneity, a plurality of voices and interpretations, and, therefore, like Hepburn and Carlson, that a modicum of familiarity with evolutionary and ecological theory actually can enhance appreciation. For example, ecological theory holds that inter-specific communication is dominated by a couple of fundamental concepts: *niche* and *territory*. Let us look at these in turn. John A. Livingston argues that the *niche* of a species:

...is not merely spatial; it is also described by what the species does - how it makes its living, how it fits into the larger community, how it affects other species.

There is something tautological about the concept of niche. This is because a niche exists only when it is occupied. We postulate a niche for every plant and animal we see in any community. If a given situation is apparently undisturbed and "natural," and a given type of

organism is absent, then we conclude that there is no niche for it... (1994, pp. 66-67).

It is easy, he argues, to assume that the presence of an introduced species that has no ecological role in a certain context, yet flourishes in its new setting, must be occupying a niche ready-for-the-taking. Goats in the Galapagos and rabbits in Australia are examples that are well documented: the determined policy of humans to eliminate both should suggest that neither have a "place" in their new-found "home"; so why the ecological preoccupation with the concept of "niche"?

...This is a truly vexatious question. In the context of exotic introductions, whether rabbit or mongoose or goat or rogue primate, or indeed ideology, niche theory becomes exceedingly problematical. Such is the case because, when a transplant fails to "take," we infer the absence of a niche for it. When it does catch on, we infer a pre-existing niche. Yet few if any wildlife ecologists, one would think, would see any feral domesticate as "belonging" in the sense of contributory integration - of properly occupying either a spatial or a *functional* [emphasis mine] space in any natural community (1994, pp. 67-68).

"Function" enjoys a very different usage in the ecological interpretation of natural communities and in music theory. In the brand of ecological theorizing that culminates in Environmental Impact Assessment, this word is definitive and absolute - not to mention ethically prescriptive. In musical theory, by contrast, it captures, or *attempts* to capture, the sounding of chordal changes (theoretically, after the fact) in order to convey the significance of improvisation over sedimented harmonic structures.

There are tonic, sub-dominant and dominant "functions" in a musical setting. One orchestrates a score in full awareness of this and of the physical limitations of the instruments, their *niches*, when one is arranging. An upright, acoustic bass can simply not do what a soprano sax does anymore than a pangolin can do what a tree hyrax does. Nor can a cello fully annex the tonality of a viola, nor a Black-and-White Colobus monkey that of a Red Colobus monkey, though they are of the same family. There are appropriate roles for everyone in the symphonic realization: the same claim that can be

made of the musical intonations of a symphony can be appropriately applied to the non-human soundings of a rainforest.

Anyone versed in musical theory understands what S.A.T.B. means: voicings from the (S) *soprano* (highest register) descending through the (A) *alto*, then the (T) *tenor*, to the ultimate ground of harmonic situational location: the (B) *bass*; they are visually arranged vertically in a score. This visual and auditory configuration is not a moment of collective decision-making to try to make musical notation comprehensible: it is *real* and it *exists* in Nature.

In his years of work studying neo-tropical birds, Steven Hilty (1994, pp. 256-265) transcended his pure enjoyment of bird song in order to speculate on why birds occupying different positions in their community - from the canopy to the forest floor - uttered such qualitatively different vocalizations in order to communicate with their brethren. It all came down to the acoustical properties of their environment. Significant information, such as the presence of a predator above, or worse, in the sub-canopy, causes some species to issue an alarm call that does not seem to be intended for any species in particular, but as a general alert to all mixed-flocks of different intra-specific affiliations that might be passing through at the moment of impending predation. But what was especially interesting is that the tonal quality of the alarm, though uttered by different species, even species from different families, was almost identical.

This discovery led him to theorize about what sort of generalizations one could make about the vocalizations of some terrestrial birds - tinamous, quail-doves, and antpittas, for example - vis-a-vis the similarity between their registrations at a certain hertz level. They all appeared to form a *bass* section, as I would describe it, and this made perfect sense as low-pitched, continuous tones can penetrate foliage much more easily than high-pitched, complex songs.

One group of bassists, the tinamous, arguably, have the most beautiful and penetrating calls of any group of bird species in the neo-tropics. Rising through a haunting series of tremulous invitations, they announce their presence at the beginning and the close of day. But they choose their time carefully. There is no competitive utterance at the same moment since their congeners are inactive. The musical improvisation carries through the

underbrush and is received, assumedly, by other tinamous. When looking at their physical environment, one can understand why visual displays are of no importance. The density of verdure disallows for far-ranging visual communication. Hence, the necessity of vocally introducing oneself by means of clear, low tones, volume increases and occasional drops or rises in pitch to reach an audience.

Birds that inhabit the canopy of a forest do not face the same difficulties. Since their medium is so rarefied, their twinkling and twittering, combined with usually resplendent plumage, attracts the attention of a prospective partner or friend. As Hilty puts it (1994, p. 259):

In the openness of the canopy, there are few reverberations and echoes because the vegetation is not so dense. Consequently, canopy birds are able to sing songs of higher frequency than their neighbours in the understorey because there is less attenuation or loss of high-pitched sounds. Rapidly modulated notes - notes that change in frequency (pitch) and amplitude (loudness) - are commonly used by canopy birds. These notes permit more variation in songs, and they still can be heard easily at some distance.

These are our *sopranos*. They are physically located both in the canopy of the forest and at the top of the score due to the high-pitched quality of their complex melodic inventions. In the canopy, low tones are not required as the voices of canopy species do not need to penetrate thick vegetation. Canopy species must, however, overcome one problem; their voices have to transmit under windy conditions. Hence, they must perform complex vocalizations that, though high-pitched, must cover as great a range of frequency as possible, so that something of what they are saying may be heard. To give an example, the voice of the skylark is so complex because, though it is grassland bird and not a canopy species, it, too, must compete with wind; moreover, it lacks the communicative aid of a colourful plumage which would be grossly inappropriate in its open habitat as it would invite the attention of a predator.

Descending through the canopy to the sub-canopy, we encounter our *alto* section. To my ears, some of the greatest songsters in the avian world occupy this space and this, perhaps, may be due to the fact that alto vocalizations tend to be much slower and clearer and, therefore, more easily perceived

and appreciated in their entirety by humans than the songs of canopy species. The songs, moreover, can be quite loud as in the sub-canopy the vegetation is at its thinnest, and so voices can carry over long distances without dissipating quickly through their arboreal absorption. The paucity of leaf-cover makes the area an ideal setting for inhabitation by large species as it is easier for them both to get around and to display their illustrious plumages and virtuoso performances. The Resplendent Quetzal of Meso-America, and the Great Blue Turaco, Chocolate-Backed Kingfisher and Red-Billed Dwarf Hornbill of the West African rainforest are cases in point. Not only are these among the most beautiful birds in the world, but the first, third and fourth show a remarkable similarity in the quality and acoustic shape of their musical invitations.

Descending again through the forest and the score, prior to encountering our bassists, we pass through our *tenor* section. Due to the very dense nature of this shrub layer, we perceive a remarkable symmetry in the solution to the problem of communicating self and place under such auditorily limiting and musically challenging conditions. What is of particular interest is that the bird species occupying this range of niches cannot be of large physical stature - coucals and other large cuckoos represent an odd exception to this "rule" - must, given the limitations of their environment, somehow produce "pure whistled tones within a narrow and rather low to moderate frequency range" (Hilty, 1994, p. 263). Those humans that occupy a northern or southern temperate climate would identify tenors in the form of such-well known birds as thrushes -robins in North America, blackbirds in Europe and southern Australia. People in the tropics, though, hear tenors - antbirds, puffbirds or woodcreepers, for example - as the potent musical and non-visual source of their morning wake-up call and crepuscular shutting-down; they can hear the invitations, but these birds are so difficult to see in the dense foliage that they may often just be considered disembodied voices. Yet *tenors* affect deeply, provide acoustic dimension in our lives, without our, perhaps, being fully aware of it.

Having encapsulated the basic analogy of ecological and musical experience within the confines of a soprano, alto, tenor, and bass experience, I present the following schema, faithful to both musical and ecological interpretations of role and functionings, understandings and interpretations of Nature. The fundamental claim is that species and tones do occupy a



niche in a loose sense and that both may be seen to represent the present manifestation of evolutionary process; as palpable immediate presences, auditory and visual invitations, they are only momentary contextual Gestalts that gather up their evolutionary origins and project them into the future through the dynamic, dialectical movement of virtual ek-static time.

<i>Musical Function</i>	<i>South America</i>	<i>Africa</i>	<i>Australasia</i>	<i>Ecological Function</i>
Soprano	Hummingbird	Sunbird	Honeyeater	Canopy Nectarivore
Alto	Toucan	Hornbill	Kookaburra	Sub-Canopy Omnivore
Tenor	Antbird	Greenbul	Scrubwren	Mid-level Insectivore
Bass	Tinamou	Guinea- Fowl	Megapode	Terrestrial Fructivore

What is particularly interesting about this schema is not only that the voicings from each group - soprano, alto, tenor, and bass - show such a consistency in musical pitch and phrasing among totally unrelated families across three continents, but that there is such physiological, anatomical symmetry between each of the families representative of each S.A.T.B. grouping. This phenomenon, known as convergent evolution, shows that bird families on different continents, which have never come into contact, have assumed startlingly similar guises in response to similar environmental pressures and that each is perfectly shaped for its ecological role.

But what of territoriality? There is, perhaps, no ecological theory more sacred or more hotly debated. To again cite Livingston:

In its simplest sense, the notion suggests that many non-human animals seek proprietorship over a foraging or breeding area, that they actively compete for such physical plots or spaces, and that they aggressively assert their proprietorship against others of their species...The more attractive the territory in terms of resources, the greater is the likelihood of its owner attracting a mate and raising a

brood which will inherit those desirable competitive qualities. The defended area is seen as the bird's freehold *property* (1994, pp. 92-93).

Perhaps it is not surprising that members of a culture devoted to the idea of private property and fierce competition for scarce resources should be inclined to perceive similar devotion elsewhere. There may, however, be other ways of looking at territoriality.

Neil Evernden offers a plausible alternative to the traditional characterization of territory as a resource-rich, quantitatively designated property that is defended at all cost from the opportunistic plundering activities of interlopers. Using the example of a small fish called a cichlid to illustrate a more qualitative interpretation of territorial behaviour he ponders what it *feels* like to have a territory:

Normally, size is of considerable importance - the big guy usually gets his way. But when the breeding season comes along, strange things start to happen; size does not necessarily prevail. It appears that once a small fish has established himself in a territory, he goes quite mad. That is to say, he does not appear to behave rationally. He does not seem to respect size at all. He even seems to forget what an insignificant specimen he is, and will attack a much larger intruder.

In short, it's as if his boundary of what he considers to be "himself" has expanded to the dimensions of the territory itself. The fish is no longer an organism bounded by skin - it is an organism-plus-environment bounded by an imaginary integument. The boundary isn't a sharp one, but rather is a gradient. The further you get from its center, the less willing is the fish to attack. It's as if there is a kind of field in the territory, with the "self" present throughout but more concentrated toward the center (1996, pp. 97-98).

As a naturalist, I have always been struck by the distinction between the quantitative and the qualitative. Why does a hummingbird go after a Red-Tailed Hawk? The size difference would seem to make such behaviour insane. Quantitatively, the hummingbird would seem to have no opportunity of repelling its much larger interloper; its speed and agility, however, ensures that it can drive away its family's potential predator. So the hawk moves on. The hummingbird would not provide for much of a meal, anyway.

What is particularly strange is that I have also witnessed large birds attacking small birds even when these are not potential prey. Why does a crow assail a Northern Pygmy-Owl? Moreover, this little (6-inch) owl, in common with other members of its genus in West Africa and Cuba, will call all day long, even though such self-promotion would appear to represent the height of foolishness by unnecessarily attracting the attention of predators. Why on earth would a small owl identify its presence so blatantly? Certainly, in North America, big owls, like the Great Horned, the Barred, and the Long-Eared assume a position which is cryptic and intended to make them invisible. They attempt to make themselves as unobtrusive as possible - the Long-Eared Owl truly looks like a piece of shaggy bark. And if they are discovered by marauding crows, will rarely stand their ground; they simply fly away to the next stand of conifers if only to get away from the cacophony in order to resume their snooze.

Why, then, should such a little bird provoke such pandemonium? It is clearly not a case of the bird posing a threat to a crow. The only answer that I have come up with is that the *quantitative* dimensions of the little owl are meaningless; what matters is that in his configuration, his phenomenological, *qualitative* aspect, he is the same as his much larger relatives: he has large eyes in the front of his head and is, thus, an owl: a significant potential threat. (As an aside, I once enjoyed watching for quite some time, a Swamp Harrier quartering over a paddock in Tasmania. She was magnificent, effortlessly graceful and bristling with intensity. When I saw her the next day, killed by a car, she was so small in death. The calipers were duly applied and quantitatively there was not much to her; she was not the significant presence she was the day before. She had become an empirical thing, devoid of quality, ready for the autopsy.)

### **Conclusion: The Appreciation of Nature's Music**

Though I am a naturalist and, therefore, derive great satisfaction in improvising upon the sedimented meanings stemming from natural history as they apply to the natural spectacle that surrounds me, I also believe that it is time to recapture some of the nineteenth-century wisdom accruing to Nature's aesthetic dimension for, like Evernden, I believe that: "Environmentalism without aesthetics is merely regional planning" (1996, p. 103).

In the remainder of the chapter, then, I seek to provide my creative story by means of a sketch of my interpretation of Nature's music. I think that the major stumbling-block to Nature's serious consideration as music is that natural sound is so complex, so seemingly haphazard, so improvisational, that there is rarely an attempt on the part of the perceiver to pare it down to its essentials. Yet, what allows for all music to fall under the rubric of "music" are but three essential items: *melody, harmony and rhythm*. That natural sound is melodic seems to be obvious enough. We enjoy the easily perceived low pitched, relatively slow phrases of thrushes and the pleasant warbling and twittering of canaries. Yet in being so easily ingested, because they are so reminiscent of instrumental timbres and phrasings with which we are familiar, is it not perhaps possible that all we are at-tuned to is the merely melodious? Is it possible that we do not take non-human melodic inventions seriously because we cannot understand their significance and, therefore, choose to pejoratively characterize them as imperfect attempts at music much in the way we politely applaud at a child's first violin recital?

To invoke an extreme, yet apposite analogy, there are few who would have the hubris to claim that they understand the blistering, full bore screechings of Ornette Coleman, perhaps not even Ornette himself. Yet, it is undeniably melodic expression, music. A musical pedant might claim that the distinction rests with the fact that Ornette's endeavours are intentional, yet this cannot always be maintained. One of the central things about improvisation at high speeds is that one "goes for the sound" on a wing and a prayer by moving into areas of tonal significance that just feel right, that have been pre-figured by years of practicing appropriate hand positionings (Sudnow, 1978). (It is fascinating to note that early Greek musical notation did not visually depict notes on a score, but only hand positions appropriate for improvisation.)

What ramifications might this have for our perception of natural sound, birdsong in particular? Iconoclastically, Charles Hartshorne has claimed that not only is birdsong musical, but that it is empirically possible to prove that is intentionally so:

...bird song illustrates the truth that animals tend to avoid the twin evils of monotony and chaos, the merely expected and orderly and the merely unexpected and disorderly. It is a statistical fact that in

singing birds either pause between utterances, thus achieving "immediate variety" as between singing and nonauditory experiences, or they vary the utterances themselves. In this and many other ways birds behave somewhat as human musicians do; they have a genuine though primitive aesthetic sense. Singing, for them as for us, tends to be self-reinforcing [*sic*], the more so the more developed the capacity to sing (1976, p. 299).

I defy anyone who has heard David Lumsdaine's recordings of Pied Butcherbirds to claim that these birds are not musicians freely and significantly communicating with each other through their melodic and harmonic improvisations. Traditional wisdom would have it that birds are pre-programmed with a limited repertoire of songs that are given solely in response to external stimuli such as a perceived threat, a perceived rival or a potential mate. To claim that mere birds are intentionally and *musically* improvising upon set pieces is to encroach on sacred ground, to besmirch an activity that is a singularly human achievement and activity. In a somewhat roundabout way, though, the opposite might be true. To truly appreciate music, one has to be good listener; but to be a good listener, one has to attune oneself to the possibility of encountering new musical invitations, to not just almost deafly receive the same old, hackneyed Schubert and Brahms. Surely it is to debase musical meaning and significance to stagnate its power by so artificially limiting its scope. As Lumsdaine says in defence of his musical soundscapes:

...to speak of anything as "a piece of music" is to indulge in a convenient fiction. Music is not a score on a library shelf; it's not the sound produced by a piano or an orchestra or a computer. Music is an activity, a particularly creative way of listening. The words *composer*, *performer*, *audience* enable us to distinguish different roles or perspectives within the context of this activity, but they must never distract us from the essentially creative contribution of each participant (cited in Rothenberg 1997, p. 122).

Here, too, he offends human sensibilities: not only are birds musical but they are creatively communicative. The purist might yield some ground with reference to the first by claiming that what we take to be intentional form is only a human projection since we can so easily grasp the

modulations and phrasings of the tune and, therefore, infer meaningfulness. But surely, the second claim is an utter fabrication?

Sadly for the purist, it is not because Lumsdaine's work, like Hartshorne's cited above, is empirically demonstrable. With very strong parallels with my own discussion in Chapter Two of the relation of sedimented meanings and authentic, creative expression in language, he explains that:

Pied butcherbirds live in family groups. Both sexes sing, and their music is fundamental to communication and bonding between members of the group. The most consistent clues to recognizing the song of a pied butcherbird are the quality of the voice and the style, or character, of its singing. The members of any group will have a number of calls that they share with other pied butcherbirds, but the musical content of the songs varies from one area to another, even between neighbouring territories. Essentially, their territory seems to be defined by the family songs that they learn from their parents and siblings, that is, by means of a musical tradition that each generation may take over and use in its own way... The pied butcherbird is a virtuoso of composition and improvisation: The long solo develops like a mosaic, through the varied repetition of its phrases. In the course of the song, some elements remain constant, and some transform through addition and elimination. The bird is a virtuoso of decoration: There is an extraordinary delicacy in the way it articulates the harmonic course of its song with microtonal inflections or places in cadences with a bird's equivalent of tremolandi and flutter-tonguing (cited in Rothenberg, 1997, p. 123).

Within the schema presented above, butcherbirds would fit into the (T)enor range and this is evident on both musical and ecological fronts: their voicings are pure, slow and deeply moving to us while being appropriate to their environmental context in the shrub layer. What is of particular interest is that, though pied butcherbirds sing antiphonally, often even in trios, it is a solo that accompanies the crepuscular break and close of day. If the soloist is not communicating with the immediate family, then, with who? Clearly, the solo vocalizations are not merely functionally aimed at maintaining the cohesiveness of the group. Nor can they be a matter of the self-promotion of an individual that is so intra-specifically social.

Suspend judgment long enough to entertain that the solo might actually be inter-specifically invitational. Is there any chance that the tenor with his accompanying bass is entreating the musical participation of the altos and sopranos that exist and belong within his extended field of self? Remember that inter-specific clashes are rare and usually predicated on perceptions of qualitative difference; attacks are initiated when an interloper gets too close to the center of one's place, one's very being. Also re-cognize that species in a shared habitat have evolved, "grown up together". Is the thought of inter-specific, not just intra-specific, compliance and community, re-acquaintance through improvized musical conduct each morning a ludicrously naive interpretation of that interpenetration? Livingston (1994, p. 96) suggests that this may be entirely possible if we "remove our culturally conditioned eyeglasses for a moment" and hear the vocalization as an expression of "place" and "belonging". Consider the bird's position:

...the shrubs and trees and herbaceous plants and all the animals within that space are in the most real and literal sense built into his existence...In singing and displaying around the periphery of his greater self, the bird may be seen as celebrating, not his proprietorship but his *presence*, the phenomenon of his being. Extended as it is, his existence... includes very many other plant and animal existences - thousands of them. What is being celebrated, then, is community. The next time you hear a bird song, think of it as a conscious (and subjective) celebration of multispecies community participation.

Is it not just possible that the human appreciation of music is a recollection of this interspecific auditory community of reciprocity and communion? Perhaps the force fit of natural sound into music may actually represent its obverse: that our belonging in the natural world makes us musical?

### Coda

Nature does make us musical. What I have argued is that phenomenologically, we already, always have had access to a mode of perception and comportment (the Listening stance) that is thoroughly musical. What is more, I have maintained that there is a definite analogy between the perception of tones and species unfolding in virtual and experiential time which can be enhanced (though not *necessarily*) by a

familiarity with basic theoretical musical and ecological constructs which delimit the experience to some degree; in banishing the trivial experience of the tourist position, such familiarity allows for fuller appreciation.

Concepts, species and chords are just frames of reference that provide the grounding for hermeneutical retrieval and improvisational exchange. Hermeneutical return to sedimented structures is an interpretation of a species' evolutionary past, while the direct contextual experience of a living species is an on-going reciprocal exchange that gathers in, recollects and reacquaints us with evolutionary history and its past manifestations in the here and now. We move through subtle nuances of meaning, micro-habitats, as we move through the forest, the symphony anticipating momentary focal clearings of soundings which reach silence at the end of the whole Gestalt. We reach the clearing: we are suddenly in the savanna without knowing how we got there and without intentionally seeking it. But this is not an end. It is the beginning of a new evolutionary thrust, musical movement. As listeners, we must hearken to its unfolding; hear it for the first time.

Moving through the forest, we perceive musically. We "anticipate" the "climax" community while on the way encountering a series of temporary micro-climatic, micro-habitat resolutions. Certainly it is easier to perceive in terms of resources - eschewing the nuances of significance that each context offers as it rhythmically emerges, "attacks" and "decays" in one seamless symphony. Surely too, the application of a simple, once-worked-through interpretation, and therefore now static thrust into the world allows us to side-step thorny normative implications of perceiving a forest solely in terms of its board-feet of timber yield. There is no doubt that we can adopt this way of thinking. Yet, if we can perceive phenomenologically and musically, maybe we can move beyond the simple identification of a "resource" with its "economic potential". I do believe that we can trade "timber" for "timbre".

What the previous chapters have attempted is a whole-scale overhaul of prejudices - ontological, epistemological, moral and aesthetic - in order to locate such biases within an historical and psychological framework. The great thing about phenomenology is that it addresses immediate concerns and coalesces interest without the superimposition of concretizing preconceptions or "factual itemization" of "things" under inspection; that is,



the transformation of worldly beings by their conceptualization as objects with nothing more than resource value. This totalizing approach has been rejected, not because it represents an inconsistent logical syllogism, but because it is an affront to ethical sensibilities and thwarts appropriate worldly comportment. Ecologically speaking, beings *do* have a "place"; they "belong" where they are contextually situated. They simply perceive their "environment" as a field for activity. They have been doing so for millennia. To judge their activity within artificial parameters, in terms of some determinate, "essential" functioning is surely a case of human hubris. Echoing David Michael Levin, Paul Shepard argues in the conclusion of *Nature and Madness* (1982, pp. 129-130):

Adults, weaned to the wrong music, cut short from their own potential, are not the best of mentors. The problem may be more difficult to understand than to solve. Beneath the veneer of civilization, to paraphrase the trite phrase of humanism, lies not the barbarian and the animal, but the human in us who knows the rightness of birth in gentle surroundings, the necessity of a rich human environment, play at being animals, the discipline of natural history...

Infants have no need of theoretical constructs to establish their place in the world. No more does any other natural being. Non-humans do not require stultifying abstractions to establish their significance in a setting. They do not need to read a text on appropriate conduct. They belong. We do too, if we truly seek to become transpersonal beings. It is, therefore, crucial to develop our capacity for wonder, curiosity, care and concern through the practice of Self-realization!. In attempting and possibly achieving truly attuned worldly comportment - understanding ourselves as processes forever in contact with all other process-based beings - we will have recaptured our musical place, our musical transpersonality.



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